

# WHEN AND WHY THE ROMAN REPUBLIC COLLAPSED

RYAN KELLY

SPRING 2021

A thesis submitted to the Honors Program at Southern New Hampshire University to complete  
HON 401, and as part of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program

Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Christopher Healow, PhD

Assistant Professor of Philosophy

Faculty Mentor

Dr. Lowell C. Matthews

Associate Professor, Global Business and Leadership

Honors Director

\*Electronic approvals are on file.

Southern New Hampshire University

Manchester, New Hampshire

## **Table of Contents**

**Introduction to Rome:** iii-iv

**Chapter 1: The Origins:** 1-13

**Chapter 2: The Gracchi:** 14-24

**Chapter 3: Marius and Sulla:** 24-50

**Chapter 4: The First Triumvirate:** 51-68

**Chapter 5: The Second Triumvirate:** 69-76

**Chapter 6: The End of the End:** 76-85

**Bibliography:** 86-88

## **Introduction to Rome**

The collapse of the Roman Republic and its transition into the Roman Empire was not caused by a single event or person, but instead a series of events. This transitional period is best known for the important characters such as Caesar, Brutus, Augustus, and Marc Antony, but these figures really just capitalized on the problems that had plagued the Republic for generations. What problems were inherent within the system that allowed them to rapidly change a nation that stood for generations? While there are numerous answers the main causes were the controlling client-patron system, the land and economic inequalities, political disenfranchisement, and the inability to reform. While these problems plagued the nation throughout its entire existence, there were certain instances and flare-ups of anger and resentment against the system that required reforms to fix, but instead an iron-fist tactic was used to quell these uprisings.

One of the most important and founding principles of Rome was the difference between the upper class who held almost all of the power in Rome and the masses. The classes were not divided solely by an economic disparity but were bound to those on a higher rung than themselves in a legal sense. This led then to individuals being totally loyal to anyone who wanted to improve their situation as well as their lord, better known as their patron, who would be able to wield them as a weapon against anyone who would try and challenge them. For the people who intended to change society the power they held meant that those who could successfully wield or “bribe” the masses with reforms would instantly become a threat to the system and cause the upper class to be worried about the growing mob rule.

For those who lived through these times of unrest in Rome certain instances of these conflicts were able to highlight in particular one of these factorial causes. During the rise of the political dissidents of the Gracchi family who tried to reform the economic and land problems

while attempting to address the inherent economic inequalities of the state and the effect mob rule that allowed the rise in importance of client-patron loyalties. To see the effect of this rule by mob in another major crisis was the of the conflict of Sulla and Marius and then of Sulla and Cinna who played up the loyalty of their clients to pull away their allegiance to the state for their own individual power. While these events themselves did not necessarily collapse the Republic itself, the path that they paved allowed these issues to fester in the nation and gave way for the Triumvirates to seize power. These political organizations of self-proclaimed reformers and champions of the people truly stood against everything the origins of the Republic were built upon, effectively collapsing the system from the inside-out.

To find both the origin and the end of the Republic, one has to look in a grand scale about what made the foundation of the way the nation viewed itself. From the very beginning Rome was an ever-shifting nation, without any clear description of itself at any given time. With every issue that arose what it meant to be the Republic would change, and as different personalities rose and fell the Republic changed with them. This creates a problem with saying that the Republic fully ended at any specific date, as sometimes the reflection in the pool genuinely represented Republican virtue and beliefs, and at other points it was rather murky. To determine then when this actually was, looking at when the image of the Republic became so distorted that it represented nothing that it had original was.

## **Chapter I: The Origins**

### **Section 1: Founding of Rome and the Tyranny of the Tarquins**

The early beginnings of Rome can be traced back to its mythological founding in the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century BC. The legacy that this city left on Western society greatly impacted most of the development of European and greater Mediterranean society. In its earliest beginnings Rome was not ruled by the Imperial and Republican system that the nation's legacy was best known for, but instead a series of monarchical kings who ruled with almost absolute power.

The series of Kings had a backing of elite nobles who referred to themselves as the patrician class whose descendants be the same families who would compose the senatorial elite of the Republican era, and would hold influence throughout all of Roman history.

The last king, Tarquin the Proud and his son would be the ruin of this government, as his son raped Lucretia, of one of his most influential and powerful nobles. The actions of this prince and the reaction of the upper class led to popular ousting of the king of Rome by leading members of society who held a vote to decide the fate of this new government.<sup>1</sup> This then laid the foundation for what would become the early Republic and their ideology of king hating, and their aversion to any personal centralization of power. While there was popular support of the ousting of the Tarquins, it is vital to realize that the same ruling elite controlled the government after the revolution, and they would have two elected leaders known as consuls instead of the

---

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that these events are likely more myth than fact and in the words of Livy “with more of the charm of poetry than of a sound historical record” from his *Histories*.

sole King.<sup>2</sup> These events are important in establishing the concepts that were key to the power struggle against the Tarquins that established a nation identity of anti-tyranny and strong decentralized power that favored many rulers instead of residing all of the power in one as the kings had done.

Those who ousted the kings then set up a new system of government, a Republic centered around a senatorial upper class who were the leaders and lawmakers of the re-founded nation. These were centered around two elected leaders, known as *consuls* who would serve for a period of about year, before having to be reelected or replaced. One of the first of the two consuls, being the two heads of government, demanded that all the people swore an oath to never again allowed any king to rule over Rome, which they did gladly.<sup>3</sup> For those that would follow, this oath was something that many people would take seriously, especially those during the transition from Republic to Imperial systems. This then would have had a lasting impact that would signal when the Republic truly died, as this idea would begin to erode before finally dying. Looking at these events the power of Rome shifted for the first time since the city's creation into the hands of the noble elite who now had total control over the nation.

In the new state the two rulers had a strong grasp on the governing of Rome, they were in essence a check and balance on one another, being able to use a consular veto to block any legislation they felt was wrong or overstepped their boundaries. The purpose of this was an attempt to strengthen the Republic against the tyranny seen under the kings for the fear that allowing any singular person to hold total power would give them the strength to restore the kingship. There was one clause in this system though that allowed for an absolute ruler to take

---

<sup>2</sup> Livy, *The History of Rome from Its Foundations*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (London: Penguin Group, 2002), pg. 101-106.

<sup>3</sup> Livy, *Histories*, pg. 108.

the reins of government in times of major crisis, the first being a show of force against commoners and Sabines.<sup>4</sup> The position, known as the dictatorship, generally fell to one of the residing consuls as it was one step upward in power and the checks and balances between the two would no longer exist, and one person then held all of the power of Rome within their hands. These powers included putting to death citizens, controlling the military, as well as nominating candidates for elected positions. This was an important role, but above all else it was a sacred role, understood to only be for saving the Republic in times of need, not for personal gain. This was adhered to by every dictator for centuries after the role's first application, and those who held it remembered the tyranny of the kings and would not use their new role lightly.

This important founding myth has always been shrouded in mystery, where the lineage of kings turned into a Republic. To those who followed after as the Republic developed it was clear that people in politics were always to adhere to this principle of hating tyranny and rejecting anyone who would make themselves a monarch. By allowing this story to embed itself in the founding mythos of Rome, henceforth those in politics would see it their duty to prevent the coming of another monarch in their nation as the tyranny of the Tarquins they believed would be the only outcome.<sup>5</sup> The new government as well then believed it likely that the only way to have a king return to Rome was through the popular support of the masses whereas those ruling elites who were directly attacked by the Kings would never think that one of them would step into that position.

---

<sup>4</sup> Livy, *Histories*, pg. 128.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg. 106-110.

## **Section 2: The Divisions**

With the tyranny of the kings successfully deposed and a Republican style government established, one could assume that these new government would focus on the drafting of equality laws or some form of mass enfranchisement. This was not the case though as the new senatorial elite that established the new government instead took a different approach, distinctly separating the different social classes through strict laws and norms that created a different situation for the upper class, but much remained the same for the lower plebian classes as was under the kings. Instead of decentralizing power after the monarchy, it instead shifted in the hands of the few. For those who participated in the revolution, the new government demanded that they swear an oath of anti-monarchy by one of the first consuls, even one with popular support.<sup>6</sup> This began to setup a system of mistrust between the general government and the common people, as the loyalty of individuals was expected to be lent to the government even if it went against their own interests.

This new system was wholly dominated by the upper classes known as the patricians who held the wealth and influence in the nation, while the rest of the country, the plebians, were the masses who held very little power except in their own numerical advantage. While there were other classes such as the equites who were originally militarized horse owners, the vast majority of people were in the plebian class.<sup>7</sup> Those in this lower class were not allowed to merge into the patrician upper class, those who were economically successful were allowed to wield some form of power and influence using this wealth to move up into the upper echelons of Rome. For the plebians, throughout Rome and their roles were usually limited, they could only hold certain

---

<sup>6</sup> Livy, *Histories*, pg. 108.

<sup>7</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, trans. Earnest Cary, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), pg. 335.



positions and at time were banned from marrying into the senatorial class, due to the fact that bloodlines were extremely important to Romans. These divisions formed what was the norms and the socially accepted standards of the day, what was adhered through by the tenacity of its historical context. These standards, the *mos maiorum*, or the way of the ancestors, formed the unwritten rules and regulations that molded the society of ancient Rome.

One of the laws limiting the plebian class in the founding of the Republic was their ban on being able to stand for the position of the Consul, the highest positions in the government.<sup>8</sup> This patrician domination during the Republican era led to a hereditary succession often of elected seats to the nobility classes, and therefore consolidated power in a few rich families.<sup>9</sup> In this sense while for those who could afford to or were born into the right class of people Rome was a Republic that allowed for freedom of the vote, elected positions, and decisions by popular vote, it was in fact more of an oligarchical system where money reigned as the supreme power. The poorer plebians were allowed in some places in the government but these limitations diluted their numerical advantage. That would also mean in times of crisis the power of the plebians would be completely null and void as almost every dictator came from the patrician class and generally favored them to appointed positions of this nature. This top-heavy dynamic of power led to those few rich people in power being able to control all aspects of life including land, jobs, and reforms which is where the cracks in the Republic began to form.

The one reprieve for the plebian class was the strength given to their *Concilium Plebis*, their legislative body that was organized only by plebians who were allowed to pass plebiscites. These plebiscites were gatherings to vote on legislation by anyone who held the right to vote and

---

<sup>8</sup> Frank Abbott, *A History and Description of Roman Political Institutions* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1901), pg. 34-35.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pg. 26.

could be called to quickly pass bills that would have died in the senate. This tool often led to adept politicians gathering their loyal voters quickly and holding a gathering with only those present passing unfavorable laws. Another power that the plebs had was the right to vote on the two positions available to them in the early Republic, the *Tribunus Plebis* and their assistant the *Aediles*. The most important, the *Tribunus Plebis*, or simply tribunes, were an official elected by the people to perform duties such as summoning the senate, but more importantly, the ability to veto motions.<sup>10</sup>

This position lent a great deal of power acting as the representative of the interests of the plebs and gave these individuals a great deal of influences within the masses. The tribunes then were often seen as the ones who would fight the system in favor of the common person. While the tribunes were not often a threat to the system, they wielded an immense amount of power beyond just their veto, as the people would look to them for reforms as well as stopping the upper classes from overreaching their power or exploitation of the masses. For the Republic to be reformed these tribunes would have to be the ones who address the issues and present them to the senate for ratification as the *mos maiorum* would suggest, but they also had the ability to pass laws. Tribunes who were not keen on pleasing the senate would use this clause to their advantage.

This conflict of trying to reform and fighting against the reformers would become to be known as the Conflict of the Orders and this would always plague the Republic and cause conflict and discontent through all levels of society.<sup>11</sup> While some changes were occurring such as the allowing of plebians to hold the consulship as the Republic continued to develop, the old

---

<sup>10</sup>Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 21.

<sup>11</sup>Appian, *The Civil Wars*, trans. Horace White, (London: Macmillan and CO., 1899), introduction, sec. 1-4.

guard still held most of power in the government and refused to give up power except through force. These old guard, the *nobiles* (those of distinct family lines) often held most positions even though they were the minority, and the *novus homo* (the new man,) those who did not come from distinguished family lineages.<sup>12</sup> While this did mean that people without those noble bloodlines were allowed in the senate and government, their power was often limited, and few were given major positions and even fewer were allowed to become consul.<sup>13</sup> This class division still at such a high level with a populace yearning for reform this in itself created a dangerous political atmosphere between those who felt marginalized and those who held the majority of power. In this the rise of a series of popular movements against the reigning system seemed inevitable, and this would inevitably agitate the ruling classes against both the masses and the new men who began to try and change the way that things had been done for generations under the nobles.

The political world of Rome was a confusing mess of push and pull between each of the classes as it was often inconsistent and relied upon when and sometimes even who you were to look at. This mess of politics meant that sometimes the Tribunes held the power who were elected by the masses, and sometimes the more hereditary senate was able to hold close the power in the nation. For those visiting the nation would say “that no one could say for certain, not even a native, whether the constitution as a whole were an aristocracy or democracy or despotism.”<sup>14</sup> This confusing web of politics, superstitions, and customs often led the Republic to have many different faces at once while still trying to be the same governing body that it always had been. For this reason, looking at the Republic like an elastic band paints a simplistic picture of this change. Every time this shift happens the band tightens moving one side to the

---

<sup>12</sup> Mike Duncan, *The Storm Before the Storm*, (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2017), pg. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Polybius, *Histories*, trans. Evelyn Shuckburg. (New York: Macmillan, 1889), book 6, ch. 11.

other, and a system like this the rubber band continues to be strained as it moves to extremes and inevitably finally snaps.

### **Section 3 Client Patron Status**

The core of growing one's social status relied upon the expansion of clients who would serve the interests of their patrons. These patrons in turn would educate and act as a benefactor to their clients within law and economics. The hierarchy in the Republic often meant the poorest would be bound to the middle class, and they would be bound to the rich and so on. These patrons were expected to explain the law to their mostly unknowing clients, giving them enormous influence over the way that the plebian classes would view the law often in favor of their patron. Further than this they were expected to represent them in lawsuits, represent their financial interests, and attempt to protect them in public life.<sup>15</sup> For the client then their perception of politics would almost always align with their patron giving them a large number of supporters to push their ideals. For the clients this system did mean they have someone trying to protect their interests but for a price, their total loyalty in all matters.

While this was the social structure of the day, it permeated into all levels of society. In the political world the clients were expected to support their leader in the senate by always voting yes to their motions and arguing in public why their patron was right in their legislation. In the *Concilium Plebis* they operated in a similar way, where these plebians who were bound to either a reformer or a patrician needed to be present during plebiscites where the larger group would control their votes. For the legislators this meant the larger their client base and the more loyal this would mean that more people would show up for a vote and therefore give them the

---

<sup>15</sup> Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold, *Roman Civilization: The Republic and the Augustan Age* vol. 1, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pg. 64-65.

chance to force through legislation that may have been unfavorable with a higher overall turnout rate.<sup>16</sup> The power that was held in this dynamic continued to expand throughout the Republican era and would dominate the political sphere and play a large part in the demise of the Republic.

#### **Section 4: The Power of Cincinnatus**

The position of Dictator in Rome was the highest and most powerful in the government, but only existed in times of extreme desperation where bureaucracy would inevitably stand in the way of effective action. The consul selected essentially had supreme power to enforce whatever policies and actions they deemed fit to hold the nation together and neutralize and internal or external threat to the system. For those who held it there was a very loose interpretation of what they were or were not allowed to do, but this fell under the *mos maiorum*, the way things had been done before. The story of Cincinnatus acted as an archetype as to what the Dictators were supposed to act like, and how they were to conduct themselves.

A figure of the everlasting embodiment of a good dictator and a good Roman was that of Cincinnatus. His life is like that of the founding of Rome, often mythic, but with important effects of propaganda on those who would also be in his role. The impact it had too would be lasting, as his story is one of a poorer noble man brought to ruin by his son, then given the most powerful position in Rome. When threats of outside invaders came to Italy, the two consuls at the time were given military power to try and deal with this threat and failing to do so. These failures proved that a real emergency was occurring, and the man chosen to deal with it was the noble Cincinnatus.<sup>17</sup> His reputation at the time was strictly anti-reformist and he was part of the pro-senatorial elite, which to the common people must have not been their choice for the

---

<sup>16</sup> Lewis and Reinhold, *Roman Civilization*, pg. 64-65.

<sup>17</sup> Livy, *Histories*, pg. 226.

dictatorship. While his views were solid, his living situation was more of what created this mythology of a great leader, as before he took the dictatorship he could be found “digging a ditch, maybe, or ploughing.”<sup>18</sup> This was not the typical individual who frequented the senate house and ruled over vast tracts of land and lorded over the masses in a noble sense. He was a strict adherent of this *mos maiorum* and followed what had been done before and showed humility in his actions. In turn he laid the archetype of what the aristocrats would identify as, regardless of how they actually handled themselves. His story passed down through the generations would act as an example to be emulated by the aristocrats in his humility and self-sacrifice to the Republic. The aristocrats would take this story to try and put up a façade that they were the heirs to Cincinnatus and would try to live as he did, even though often this was not the case.

For Cincinnatus, it was evident that he did not want to be a king, a tyrant, or any kind of dictator, as within fifteen days of gaining the position he resigned; even though his term was supposed to last for six months.<sup>19</sup> His willingness to give up power laid the foundation for those who would follow, as they would be expected to act as he did, turning over the office at the first available moment. Possibly even more important was that he himself was poor, he gave up what he had for the nation. Where he could have instead used crisis and power to profit fiscally and politically, he chose instead to empower the position of the Republic to trust in a dictator to have their own needs and want come second to Rome's. His legacy then would be trusting in the same *mos maiorum* that if this power was given to any individual, they would follow the path of Cincinnatus and to do otherwise would be unthinkable.

---

<sup>18</sup> Livy, *Histories*, pg. 226.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pg. 230.

Where someone like him could have gained riches and powerful positioning from his appointment he chose not to. This was not the only time his legend was able to expand, as when a certain Spurius Maelius began to pander to the masses to attempt to gain power as a king, Maelius was able to pack the government with those close to him and it was clear that tyranny was afoot.<sup>20</sup> When this was revealed to the senate, it was clear something had to be done and fast before Maelius' plan was set in motion, and once again Cincinnatus was called upon to take the reins of power. In the following series of events the tyrant was murdered in the streets by the dictator's *magister equitum*<sup>21</sup> and again Cincinnatus had saved the Republic from assured destruction through tyranny and returned to his farm. This part of his story was a dangerous one, as Maelius was determined to be a tyrant, and for this he was killed, but as the timeline of the Republic continued, the word tyrant became looser in its definition.

The legacy of Cincinnatus was decisive in the abilities of Romans to trust the senatorial class and the government to make the right choice in giving this supreme position of power to. To this same purpose the power of the *mos maiorum* of how these politicians would act as a dictator lent weight to the senator's belief that this would be followed, and these unspoken rules would be adhered to. To give total power to this extent with very little regulation of this power was a dangerous concept but the gravity that customs and norms played alleviated much of the fear in giving a single individual this much power. Further than this looking who was the "bad guy" in this mythology influenced the Roman elites, in that the people would be the ones to raise a tyrant to power. These founding myths in the Republic would lead one to believe that those

---

<sup>20</sup> Livy, *Histories*, pg. 236-237

<sup>21</sup> This position was the second in command to the dictator and were the hands to the dictator's mind. Later in the Republic this position would lend a great deal of weight to Marc Antony and Lepidus after the death of Caesar.

who broke the traditions of the ancestors or those who were popular with the people were not only dangerous but had to be dealt with in the same way Cincinnatus had.

### **Section 5: Economic Inequalities**

The largest problem facing the Republic internally throughout its existence but more so in the 100s BC was that of massive economic inequalities facing the country. This problem was exacerbated by the decline of political stability and trust in the system as war by the masses was growing but was not being addressed. A growing trend that hurt the largest amount of the populace was the ability of the elite class becoming richer from foreign conquests. As the Republic expanded more land was being taken from foreign nations, but more than this, slaves were taken. When this land was distributed the wealthy upper class would buy up most of the farmlands and turn them into slave run plantations. For the masses this would mean that the jobs were no longer being distributed to them but instead to the cheaper slave labor that was able to produce more goods at a lower cost. For smaller farmers this meant that they would often lose their land due to the output generated by the plantations would greatly outpace theirs.<sup>22</sup> Those who lost their farms would often need to find employment elsewhere, often causing mass urbanization without having the jobs to meet an expanded work force. For the lower and middle classes this meant they were facing a more competitive job market and those who could not find work would join the military, perpetuating the cycle of needed new land and the consequences that came with it.

In economic politics this led to two parties forming, conservative senatorial *Optimates* on one side and the reforming people's party the *Populares* on the other side, and a moderate group

---

<sup>22</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, ch. 1, sec. 7.



in the middle but often moving from one side to the other as need arose. The senatorial faction feared the numerical advantage the populace had on their side, and therefore were afraid of reformers in the *populares* who could use this popular support against them and attempted to block reforms including those meant to redistribute resources to the masses.<sup>23</sup> These redistributions would close the wealth gap between the upper and lower classes but understanding that many patrons would lose their client base, and more clients to the patrons who sought to redistribute lands.

Many saw this as a detriment to themselves as having the potential to take away their land and their wealth and give to someone else, but there were other reasons. Individuals like the famed orator and combatant of tyranny Cicero can even admit that he “cannot find fault with the general principle of an agrarian law,” but the possibility of rousing the masses to an almost large scale bribe of land was dangerous.<sup>24</sup> This would have inevitably been the stalling point to any major land reform, the fear of the love that the masses could bestow upon one person for giving them wealth and in turn make them a tyrant. That constant hatred and fear of the potential restoration of the monarchy created a growing fear of reforms. For those who then wanted change it gave deepened impression that change was not going to be easy, and for the conservative ruling class that maybe there was some truth in bribing the masses in return for a throne.

---

<sup>23</sup> Cicero, *On the Agrarian Law*, trans. C.D. Young, (London: Bohn’s Libraries, 1856), sec. 1-3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, sec. 5, line 1-2.

## **Chapter 2: The Gracchi**

### **Section 1: The Brothers of Reform**

The most important and influential attempts to reform the Republic laid in the hands of two brothers, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus. These two had led the charge at reforms with attempts to alleviate the economic suffering of the lower classes in the 100s BC targeting mainly land reforms, which would forever in western societies be synonymous with their names.<sup>25</sup> These reforms aimed at improving the situation of the poorer masses by allowing land to be taken away from public and government ownership that the upper class profited from and return this to the people. This redistribution was aimed at taking away mostly illegally owned land from the senatorial class that technically belonged to the public domain but was being used for profit as generally farmland. The laws against this entailed that the land that was considered publicly owned could only be used up to a certain acreage by any one person, and any excessive usage of this was illegal and had to be redistributed to other potential landowners, and since the elites were ignoring this law, they profited immensely.<sup>26</sup> For those who were not able to profit from this were the smaller landowners and landed veterans who were being pushed off their land by these patricians and flooding into the cities for work. In a sense, fixing this was an attempt to follow the law, not change it as this land was originally intended to be used more by the common people than those who already had enough land for their needs.<sup>27</sup> These conditions paved the way for the older brother, Tiberius, a tribune of the plebs, to be the first person to seriously threaten the patrician class with land reforms backed by popular support.

---

<sup>25</sup> Tom Holland, *Rubicon*, (New York: Doubleday, 2003), pg. 28-29.

<sup>26</sup> Duncan, *The Storm*, pg. 25.

<sup>27</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, ch. 1, sec. 7.

To understand the severity of this threat looking backwards at the inherent problems in the Republican system can give insight into why the fears here were so great aimed at land reform. While the economic inequality was growing, the wealth was being used by the upper class to expand their base of clients and therefore expand their power in the government.<sup>28</sup> Therefore for those who held this land it was crucial for them to hold onto their wealth to the extent that they held it for the purpose of keeping their client and supporter base loyal to them. If these clients became discontent, they would find someone else to give them patronage and then lower the power base of the original patron. So, when a politician came around who stood in a plebian held position and offered to hand out land, those who felt that this property was rightfully theirs and felt it was needed, this was a politician who was going to gain a following. For the senatorial class, this was a threat that could not be allowed to rise.

## **Section 2: The Rise and Fall of Tiberius Gracchus**

The reforms his faction intended to put forward, the *Lex Agraria* seemed to be more of an enforcement of former laws aimed at preventing too much wealth disparity and improper usage of public land.<sup>29</sup> While it did not seem like he wanted to prosecute those who illegally held land, he did want to properly set up a commission to deal with these issues and properly redistribute land to those who actually needed it. This meant that the ruling class who held the power in the government were expected to willingly hand over land to people they saw as a direct threat to their power and wealth, and not get the credit for it. The idea that one person would be allowed to take the credit for giving out this property was a terrifying thought, and this fear was not to be taken lightly. Those who try to win the favor of the people could only be doing it for one reason

---

<sup>28</sup> Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold, *Roman Civilization*, pg. 64-65.

<sup>29</sup> Duncan, *The Storm*, pg. 25.

they believed, and that was to make themselves king. For the senate, this was an action that could not be tolerated, as it directly contended with the *mos maiorum* as they saw it and took away their ability to keep their client base loyal.

This proposal of land reforms was not presented to the senate in the normal form that Roman politics was accustomed to, but it was not illegal to do so. He instead presented it to the assembly of voters instead, and called for a plebiscite to be held. This was a major step to having it passed but a deep slight to the ruling elite that would not be forgotten. The steps he took were to ensure its passing, as a way to avoid its inevitable lack of senatorial support.<sup>30</sup> In some ways his way of presenting these laws violated the *mos maiorum* thoroughly upsetting and surprising the state of being in the Republic, as the senate felt that their power to control this bill was being curbed where it had always been their choice when reforms such as this was presented. While this helped there was more to be done to get this law passed, as it could be vetoed by his opponents as well as trying to keep all the voters in one place seemed an impossible task. Tiberius' plan to solve this required a great deal of political maneuvering by removing those who disagreed with him from office, as well as voter packing when needed. After he completed this task the law finally passed, and serious land reforms were underway for the first time in many years.<sup>31</sup>

For those affected by the bill it seemed that it was an attempted to strengthen the overall Republic by making sure that the law was indeed being followed by all, not just those who had to operate within it. It also acted as a kind of relief package to those being affected by the consolidation of land and overall help the suffering of the disenfranchised. The outcome of this

---

<sup>30</sup> Duncan, *The Storm*, pg. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, ch. 1, sec. 11-12.

bill could not have been further from helping the Republic as the violent reaction ripped open these wounds appearing in the Roman society. When Tiberius' term ended as tribune, most of the senate assumed this meant that his moment in the limelight was going to pass and he was ready to retire from politics. It came as a shock when his name appeared on the bill backed with serious amounts of popular support and this was unacceptable to the landed elites. The word tyrant was on the lips of every senator and landed plebian who would lose land to his ideals and with long speeches on the senate floor attacks against his character attempted to create an idea that Tiberius meant to make himself king.<sup>32</sup> Those who felt threatened were compelled to act and they rounded up their clients and supports and led an assault armed with clubs on Tiberius and his followers killing many of them including the tribune himself beating them mercilessly and throwing their bodies into the Tiber.<sup>33</sup> The attackers themselves did not consider this a murder, but merely an act of counter-revolution, a way to save the Republic from tyranny before it even began to ferment.

This outburst of violence was not just a flare up of tensions, but truly was the first nail in the coffin for the Republic. From here on the political violence would escalate, normalize, and become the means to prevent enemies from rising and reformers from acting. To ensure this the senatorial class decided that a purge was in order to cement this death as a tyrannicide, which in their nation was a legal act and could not be considered a coup or even a murder. Further than this they had decided to eradicate those who survived the initial bloodshed, to further deter pesky reformers from trying to take away their land and consolidate their own power. In this sense the

---

<sup>32</sup> While it is not entirely clear whether or not they really believed Tiberius wanted to make himself king, they had their excuse to get rid of him legally. This also helped the more moderate groups to allow this to happen, for them land reform could be tolerated, but a tyrant could not.

<sup>33</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, ch. 2, sec. 16.

power was no longer just politically in control by the senate, they had force on their side and were willing to use it against anyone who tried to upset the balance.

According to the laws of Rome it was illegal to kill citizens without first having a trial or a vote by the assemblies of the tribes, the groups of plebians who Tiberius had once been elected by. After his death, this was no longer the case as the senate formed their own commission to deal with the reformers who acted by executing some and banishing even more of Tiberius' allies.<sup>34</sup> To do this was gross misconduct in the eyes of the *mos maiorum*, as this was seen as the senate forming their own tyranny to eradicate the remnants of an opposing political party. This set the precedent of what was to come in the following hundred years, as those who wanted to consolidate power would follow in the footsteps of the senate, forming their own commission to deal with tyranny, real or fiction. These trials ended up being the start of the downward slope for the Republic as many of those who led these trials and normalized them continued to use these tactics to rid themselves of rising politicians in their path. They would not be the only ones who would use this power, but whoever could take it by force were not going to use this and claim that they were acting in the defense of Rome.

### **Section 3: First Came Tiberius, Then Came Gaius**

In the Roman world after the death of Tiberius, his faction moved hands to his younger brother who is known to have been such a good orator that he “made the other orators appear to be no better than children.”<sup>35</sup> If those who thought Tiberius was a threat, Gaius was even more influential and aggressive in manners for reforms. The difference between the two was clear as

---

<sup>34</sup> Duncan, *The Storm*, 39.

<sup>35</sup> Plutarch, *Caius Gracchus*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), ch. 1, sect. 3.

“Tiberius was reasonable and gentle, while Caius<sup>36</sup> was harsh and fiery, so that against his better judgment he was often carried away by anger as he spoke.”<sup>37</sup> These praises were not understated and as the heir to his brother’s legacy, the threat of a fine young orator with reformist ideals pushing his way into politics was menacing the old order. It was also in recent memory for those in politics how brutally Tiberius had just been dealt with and what happens to those who try to change the way of the state. This Gaius knew all too well, and therefore instead of just using a singular reform in the style of his brother he attempted to create major overarching reforms to try and mend the problems of the Republic and in the footsteps of his predecessor, the tribunate was the best way.<sup>38</sup> This meant that he did not only want to threaten the economic situation but intended to go after political reforms as well.

To complete these ideas Gaius would need to hold some power and he was elected again to the tribunate, similar to the path of his brother.<sup>39</sup> These reforms were presented to try and permanently improve the overall situation by going after those who abused the system for personal gain and remove the necessity of having constantly hereditary seats. If these reforms were allowed to pass, they could have fixed the system for the time being and undone much of the damage that had been done in recent years by the elites. His radical ideas both were an attempt to save the Republic but also to get justice.

His proposals targeted mostly those who had been responsible for killing his brother and had enacted laws that went after politicians who had banished others without the proper trials in an attempt to weaken the power of these committees who had begun to eradicate his party.<sup>40</sup> The

---

<sup>36</sup> Caius is the latinized name of Gaius.

<sup>37</sup> Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), ch. 2, sec. 4.

<sup>38</sup> Duncan, *The Storm*, pg. 61.

<sup>39</sup> Plutarch, *Caius Gracchus*, ch. 4-5.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, ch. 4, sec. 2.

second part of his reforms included similar and same laws previously passed by his brother, as well as one targeting at giving the military free clothing that would be paid for by the state.<sup>41</sup> For the senate this was worse than what Tiberius had done as it now directly targeted their newly created defenses against reform, and now it was not just the people they felt Tiberius had bribed, but the military as well. In a sense it did seem that at this time if Gaius had truly wanted to do so he could have potentially established himself as an autocratic ruler and even the possibility of this happening was too frightening to be allowed. This created an atmosphere of unease in the senate, knowing that something had to be done about Gaius, and the word tyranny was again being aimed at a Gracchi and their faction.

The consul at the time, Opimius, had a notorious reputation for cruelty, potentially excessive brutality against opponents, and a very anti-reformist ideology making him Gaius' chief rival.<sup>42</sup> When Opimius came to the realization that the damage that Gaius could do to his standing and that of his domineering party, something had to be done to get rid of him and his support group once and for all. This opportunity came when the supporters of each side met and had an altercation in the forum which a servant of Opimius was killed and this opened the door for him to make a move.<sup>43</sup> In the series of events that occurred after this mob violence, the Romans who wrote about it differ in the context of what really happened, but the fallout remains the same. The historian Appian truly seems to believe that Gaius really intended to establish some kind of tyranny backed by popular and military support.<sup>44</sup> For those who sought to get rid of him this would mean that if they did indeed kill him, as they did his brother, it could be justified as a rightful tyrannicide and therefore legal and no punitive action could be taken

---

<sup>41</sup> Plutarch, *Caius Gracchus*, ch. 5, sec. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, ch. 11, sec. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 3, sec. 25.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



against them.<sup>45</sup> The difference between the two was that Tiberius' death was a conspiracy for tyrannicide, but Gaius' was a state sanctioned assassination.

The last straw came when Gaius intended to pass a bill opening more colonies for the poor that would give them less rents combined with a bill to give voting rights and citizenship to Italians.<sup>46 47</sup> For the Italians this would mean better integration into the Republic and expand the base of political enfranchisement across the board spreading more power to everyone residing under Roman controlled areas. For the senate, this was an abhorrent notion that degraded their influence and ancestral rights by allowing others to have a say in Roman law and Roman rule, an unacceptable proposal that was struck down and had disastrous consequences in the decades to follow. Regardless of the intentions of Gaius, the end for him was near, as the senate had given license to Opimius to restore order in the city with no limitations to what this meant, and a short skirmish ensued. Opimius at this time had the power to put down any opposition to senatorial rule including killing citizens, akin to the power of a dictator without actually holding the office. This led to Opimius' supporters killing the followers and some of the families of Gaius' supporters during which he was either killed or committed suicide and his head was removed for a bounty.<sup>48</sup> For the time being this completely broke the back of the reformist faction to the point that it would take decades for them to be enough of a threat to make any political moves.

#### **Section 4: The Legacy of the Gracchi**

---

<sup>45</sup> For an opposing historical perspective, a more favorable view of Caius is in Plutarch's *Caius Gracchus*, where he truly believes that Caius was not up to anything tyrannical, but his followers instead were using him to gain power to create a kind of reformist imperialism seen later in the Republic.

<sup>46</sup> Plutarch, *Caius Gracchus*, ch. 5, sec. 1.

<sup>47</sup> At this time in the Republic Italians had been fighting in the army, making money for the state, and serving in all levels of society but lacked the right to vote or to hold citizenship. There were movements throughout the peninsula for them to be held at the same status as Romans as they had fought to defend Rome in many of the nation's wars.

<sup>48</sup> Plutarch, *Caius Gracchus*, ch. 17, sec. 4.

Now this was not the end of attempts to reform the Republic by far, but the instances of the Gracchi brothers being murdered for being reformists and in the name of ending a tyranny signaled the events that were to follow. This rigid resistance to any kind of reforms that would hurt the upper class showed that these wounds on the system were beginning to tear further open and that anyone who tried to fix them would meet the same fate as the Gracchi faction. The line in the sand had been drawn and anyone who crossed it knew how things would go for them if they chose to continue. Not only did this deter reformers but it blocked any kind of real change coming permanently to the Republic that would enfranchise more people or would allow a broader distribution of resources that was demanded by the plebians and the veterans who wanted land of their own. Further than this though were the establishment of a kind of ad hoc court system held by the elite that was able to punish anyone it wanted regardless of their station or rights. This was probably the most important piece that came out of this period as weaponizing this against political opponents was about to become even more commonplace. There was hope though that one reformer or standing governing figure was going to be able to course correct and fix the broken system before it was no longer usable.

Probably even more dangerous than this, it showed that people who wanted power in the Republic were now capable of using the general masses to propel themselves into the power positions they desired. While one could argue that maybe Gaius was using mob rule to pass legislation, less good-natured individuals saw this as an opportunity to use violent mob rule to rid themselves of political enemies. Further than this though was the establishment of a kind of ad hoc court system held by the senate that was able to punish anyone it wanted regardless of their station or rights. This system was one of the lasting legacies of the time period as that tactic would continue to be used by both parties to gain the upper hand.

In the aftermath of the Gracchi there were some left in their party attempting to fix the problems in the corrupted ruling class by forming corruption commissions against the ruling class, headed by Gaius Memmius and Gaius Memilius. These two in the wake of the end of the Gracchi managed to drag a deal of leading figures from both parties before their commission on corruption charges and effectively had them banished from Rome.<sup>49</sup> While this certainly did not fix the constant and internal problems plaguing the Republic and it did not go as far as perhaps Gaius Gracchus would have liked for these types of reforms to go, it was a signal that there was still hope. This hope would change to violence shortly after, as the events that signaled the end of the Republic were about to begin and these problems were ready to explode with the rise of the new faces in Roman politics. This legacy was the beginning of the extremes, the way that the rubber band of the Republic started to strain, and unless it could be reformed it would keep tightening.

---

<sup>49</sup> Duncan, *The Storm*, pg. 105.

## **Chapter 3: The Reign of Marius and Sulla**

### **Section 1 Setting the Stage**

Before the conflict between Marius, Cinna, and Sulla would tear apart the Roman Republic, the tide was beginning to turn politically against the Senatorial class. This was mostly caused by their inability to make any real change to bring relief to the suffering of the lower classes, and the unlanded veterans who felt they deserved compensation. To make matters even worse a series of slave uprisings in Sicily known as the Servile Wars between 135 and 71 BC took away some of the martial confidence that many of the people had held for the senate as these quickly got out of control. The people began to see their inability to act quickly and effectively as a sign of weakness and as a need for change as these revolts instilled fear in a nation that had an expansive slave owning population.<sup>50</sup> In the senatorial system the old order seemed to be failing and more of the *novus homo* were gaining popularity as champions of the people, many of them veteran commanders of foreign and domestic wars and therefore felt more connected to the plight of the many and of the military.

This was not the only issues presenting themselves as the Republic began to feel pressure on its African borders as kings once loyal to Rome had now seen dissent among the ranks in Rome's military and political sphere as an opportunity to make a name for themselves. This further deteriorated relations between the people and the ruling class as they began to look towards finding other political advocates who could help them. Patrons at this time who were less inclined to reform or not adept in military matters began to see the weight of their names mean less, and their clients looking elsewhere even to those who had never had an ancestor on

---

<sup>50</sup> Duncan, *The Storm*, pg. 134-135.

the senate floor. With the wars in Africa known as the Jugurthine Wars in the late 110s and late 100s BC not going in favor of the Romans many of the new men saw an opportunity to make a name for themselves, leading to some of the most corrupt and aggressive political tactics seen in Rome yet.<sup>51</sup> Senators were bribed by foreign powers, armies were not able to act due to bureaucracy, and the entire system was on the verge of collapse. These conflicts shown light upon some of the up-and-coming military leaders, namely one Gaius Marius.

## **Section 2: Men of Little Substance**

Gaius Marius was an important figure in the late Republic who had ran for the consulship on a reformist platform. He had won his position and his election to the consulship of Rome was one that backed by popular support in which he campaigned against the senate's authority as he found them to be men of little substance, just shining names.<sup>52</sup> This was important not only in the actions that Marius and his opponents would soon take to truly rip the Republic asunder, but in that he was a *novus homo*, not from the noble bloodlines of many of his colleagues. Through his election by the popular support of the people, and yet again against the senatorial elite, he was another major threat to the establishment coming to power. His role was one that was easy to abuse, as anyone who stood for the people could use the people's power for their own gain.

Characters in these reformer parties often found themselves in a similar predicament, as their actions in of themselves may often be for selfish reasons but are always presented as the people's candidates with intentions of serious reforms. Marius was one of these reformers who also intended to benefit from this positioning and his ego gave him the drive to continue to pursue reforms on all levels of society. His actions in power really set him apart from the

---

<sup>51</sup> Sallust, *The Jugurthine War*, trans. John Watson, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1899), ch. 5.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, ch. 85.

reformers who came before him as he could accept making some promises that he was not going to keep if it meant he would get ahead of an opponent.

In the election cycle of 104 BC as Marius ran for his fourth election as consul, and unusually high number. This trend of *novus homo* candidates taking higher and more powerful positions continued until they held a huge bulk of the political power in the Republic. For the first time in history, two non-noble candidates held the consular positions.<sup>53</sup> For the senatorial elite, these *populare* candidates meant business, and they made clear no *optimates* who abused their position was safe. To further their anti-corruption stance commissions were held to put on trial the senators who had used the Jugurthine wars to overstep their power. They charged those who had stolen money, taken bribes, or were otherwise following self-interest instead of the people's needs. For the masses, this seemed like a wonderful idea as the senators who had gone so long untouched by the law were finally going to be held accountable for their actions. This hope that law was going to be enforced quickly dissipated as the trials were vetoed as soon as they had begun, breaking trust in the system for many reform minded politicians, but for the masses and soldiers who felt these trials were finally going to fix the issues preventing them from winning wars in Africa.

One of the politicians of the Marian faction, Saturninus, was particularly capable of weaponized the masses against the senatorial class as he intended to go after any of those who stood in his way, as his ambitions went beyond justice and intended to wield this popular support as a sword.<sup>54</sup> While those in his side of the political isle were clearly reformers, he was more self-inclined in his political reforms and would target anyone with threat of the masses to keep

---

<sup>53</sup> Duncan, *The Storm*, pg. 133.

<sup>54</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch 4.

them under his will and protect himself from investigation. As the modern historian Mike Duncan described him, Saturninus “was the first to show the demagogues of the future generations just how far cynically manipulated mob violence could push a man’s career forward.”<sup>55</sup> He intended to step away from the Gracchi way of trying to use the will of the masses to merely outnumber the elite, he intended to use them as his personal army. His aggressive tactics turned the more peaceable actions of the prior reformers into the creation an attack mob that would go after anyone who stood against him with violence or the threat of violence.

## **Section 2: Marius’ Mules**

Marius’ legacy can truly be traced back to his formations of legions of non-landowning plebians which before his time was not allowed. His reforms were both unique and dangerous because he allowed the poorest people throughout Italy to be able to find a job as a legionary. The danger this posed is something that warlords have capitalized on throughout history, as they took desperate people and gave them arms to fight for a general who became a provider, not the state itself.<sup>56</sup> These new types of soldiers were especially dangerous to the stability of Rome as popular rulers such as Marius who hated the ruling class now had a personal army loyal to themselves. Further than this these impoverished soldiers were going to be pulled from those likely to have supported his style of politics. These were the same people who hated the ruling class for their economic domination of Rome, and therefore could be easily persuaded to turn their arms against the elites. Thus, Marius had effectively given military training to the masses where it had never been before, and there was potential for ambitious leaders to embolden those

---

<sup>55</sup> Duncan, *The Storm*, pg. 148.

<sup>56</sup> Sallust, *The Jugurthine War*, ch. 85-56.

that the senate feared the most, the people. The people who were in Marius' army often acted more like clients than soldiers under a command, he stood for them politically and they stood for him on the battlefield as well as during plebiscites. He in turn would now have a large supporter base that also had military capabilities and fighting experience who were willingly to follow their patron commander over the rule of the state. This gave the military leaders in the Republic a new sense of strength, and with Marius' attitude towards the senate continuously deteriorating and his popular support ever expanding, it was clear that something dangerous was brewing.

Marius had been sent to Africa to deal with the conflicts in that region with a sizable command. His new legions were successful in controlling the border regions of the Republic, but a lifelong rivalry was beginning to brew between Marius and a young noble upstart serving as quaestor<sup>57</sup> under his command by the name of Sulla.<sup>58</sup> While Marius was often Sulla's commander it was clear that the two were destined to never get along and tried to constantly undermine the other. While this rivalry continued to brew it was clear that Marius was the dominate man in Rome during the last decade of the 100s BC, as he was able to destroy every external threat to the Republic with a series of extraordinary and continuous military victories. With the situation in Africa now completely under Roman rule due to the campaigns led by Marius it was time for him to make alliances back home, and Saturninus was the leading option.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> This was essentially a financial quartermaster, serving on a general's staff.

<sup>58</sup> Duncan, *The Storm*, pg. 125-131.

<sup>59</sup> Plutarch, *Caius Marius*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), ch, 28, sec. 5.



### **Section 3: The Alliance of the Tyrants**

Their alliance then became the catalyst for the next phase of injury to the Republic and again political violence exploded as they murdered candidates who stood against them, put forth bills that forced the senate to bow to their will in the name of the people, and in essence to their total control of politics.<sup>60</sup> Saturninus and his supporters formed gangs that terrified everyone who opposed them with threats of violence and caused mass political fighting throughout the city. To consolidate his power Saturninus began a reign of terror in Rome, as mob attacks continued throughout the city and he used the ad hoc trials that targeted the Gracchi against the same party that originally imposed them. The blood flowed in the city as armed mobs were now doing battle on the streets as the *optimates* tried to form gangs of their own in a way that had never been seen before.<sup>61</sup> The *populare* gangs would target anyone who seemed to be a threat to their reforms that were going to cement the loyalty of the plebian class and the remnants of the Gracchi faction as clients of Saturninus.

When Marius had returned with his military force, this presented him with an interesting opportunity to gain favor with the people. While the violence in the city was tearing the nation apart, the masses who would be pulled into this aligned themselves with the reformers. This meant for Marius that creating an alliance with Saturninus would both advance his cause and his client base. With their alliance agreed to they set about consolidating their power with Marius as the military wing and Saturninus as the head of the political wing in their party. In a shock to the senate the same tactics they had used to undermine and destroy the Gracchi brothers and their supporters was now being turned back against them to try and wrestle power away from the

---

<sup>60</sup> Plutarch, *Caius Marius*, ch. 48.

<sup>61</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 4.

senate and old guard. This was the next phase of the power shift in Rome, as the influence held with an iron grip by the upper classes was now being torn away from them and placed into the hands of this new aggressive and despotic reformist faction.

At this point the situation Saturninus and Marius had built was the closest Rome had yet to come to a full tyrannical rule since the days of the Tarquins. They were at the brink, and the breaking point was approaching as Saturninus and his camp were taking full advantage of the demand for reform by smashing the system entirely and putting themselves at the forefront of all aspects of Roman life, and no one was safe. To say that the Gracchi had violated the *mos maiorum*, Saturninus had removed its relevancy completely to politics.

For even Marius, this was beginning to be too much for him, and he feared that he would eventually be a target, so he cut a deal with the senate to ensure his survival in the aftermath of the violence. Marius having a prominent ally new with the senate knew that the time had come to break away from these so-called reformers and use this to his tactical advantage to further himself in the world of politics. In the elections of 99 it was clear that these two dominating powers were going to clash, and the unfortunate victim during election day was the same Gaius Memmius who had been a supporter of popular rule and holding the senators accountable for their actions through his corruption trials. He was beaten to death for running for consul against Saturninus' man and died by the same party that he so aggressively campaigned for.<sup>62</sup>

Saturninus and Marius' slow departure from alliance suddenly became increasingly violent as it was clear one of the two now had to win by force, and Marius was seen as the best option to the senate and the elites even though he was still their enemy. The chaos had gotten

---

<sup>62</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 4, sec. 32.

completely out of control and something needed to be done about this radical and power-hungry faction. Their nature of going after everyone and anyone who opposed them was ready to come full circle as the senate convened with Marius to see what was going to be done as the reformist faction began to eat itself. This gave the senate and their tedious ally Marius an opportunity to strike and hopefully take the power back into their hands. He was then given instruction by the senate to crush his enemy using whatever means necessary, the same command Opimius was given to. Seeing the writing on the wall Saturninus and his followers seized the capitol and were besieged by Marius' forces who promptly cut off water supply and compelled those inside to surrender, ending their tyranny.<sup>63</sup>

Unfortunately for these reformers, but fortunately for the senate they met the same fate as those who came before them even though who actually killed them is contested. While being held prisoner, a mob broke into the senate house where they were being held and promptly stoned all of them to death ending their reign of terror in a bloody massacre, a theme which seemed to permeate throughout the 1st and 2nd century BC as the proper setting to rid the Republic of a tyrant.<sup>64</sup> Another account is that they were promptly executed even though Marius tried to intercede on their behalf.<sup>65</sup> Either way Marius' hands were clean of the blood of the reformers, and the time had come to give the power back to the senate. Thus, the tyrants had been killed, order had been restored, the senators in the *optimates* faction firmly in control, those banished were free to return, and clearly the *Populares* were out of favor. These acts of violence that had never been seen before in the city, and the consequences were so severe that it ensured that nothing would ever be the same after this. Though the power had been restored to its

---

<sup>63</sup> Plutarch, *Caius Marius*, ch. 30, sec. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 4, sec. 33

<sup>65</sup> Plutarch, *Caius Marius*, ch. 30, sec. 3.

original owners and the day-to-day was heading back to a relaxing normal, something had to be done to pull the Republic out of this downward spiral. If these trends continued it would be only a matter of time before someone on either side would be able to consolidate their power enough that they would emerge victorious, and the end of the Republic would be at hand.

### **Section 3: The Question of Citizenship That Brought Down the Republic**

The next stage in the tale of the Republic begins with quick rise and fall of Marcus Drusus, a *Populares* aligned tribune who intended to pass a bill expanding citizenship to the Italic states under the rule of Rome. Drusus wanted to grant them citizenship through a right to vote similar to that of the Plebians allowing them to stand for positions, but this was rejected. This type of bill had been proposed before, but the Roman-centric world of politics disallowed anyone not of Roman heritage to obtain citizenship as this threatened the status quo by giving more rights to reformist minded people. For his actions in trying to pass this bill, Drusus was murdered by the optimates in the streets of Rome as they called him a tyrant wanting to build an Italian army of clients.<sup>66</sup> The reasoning for denying those who had supported Rome for centuries is strikingly similar to that of why the Gracchi brothers were met with so much resistance. Whoever handed a mass amount of people whatever they wanted now controlled those masses as a patron, giving the reformers of these newly enfranchised people influence over the Italians who were unfamiliar with the system and may need assistance from the person who stood for their rights. This led to every reform in the Italic citizenship debates being vetoed for the same reasons that the land bills were being pushed away.

---

<sup>66</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 5, sec. 36-37.

For the Italians who had constantly served Rome this was the breaking point, not only were they being denied what they saw as their rightful citizenship rights, those who stood for them were being killed. In response they rose up in revolution demanding either independence or citizenship and yet again a major crisis was in the hands of the government.<sup>67</sup> In true Roman response it was determined that what was best was to go after the politicians who supported the Italic citizenship bill declaring them as enemies of the state, and they were to be held responsible.<sup>68</sup> If there could be one reason that the Roman Republic was doomed to fail is that instead of recognizing problems and working to fix them, they instead claimed they those who tried to fix them were the problems themselves.

While the Italians were threatening revolution, the political sphere was becoming just as heated as the countryside due to Marius intending to be the main character in the government. This was met with heavy resistance by Sulla who was a rising figure in the *optimates*, these two were again natural enemies. While this nearly came to a head and the two men almost took arms against each other the Italians rose in revolution and this began the Social War of 91-87 BC had begun. The two sides had to put their issues aside for the time being, but Romans never forgot a grudge. The Roman forces under these two figures had begun to quell this rebellion by dealing with those who rose up and slowly over the years in the end of the war regained domination in the peninsula. When the war concluded the honors of victory fell further into the lap of Sulla who had more dashing exploits and risky gambles. Marius had taken his time and thinking through his plans and his old age slowed him down taking him away from the more dangerous

---

<sup>67</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, sec. 39

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, book 1, ch. 5, sec. 37.

parts of the fighting. His lack of being glorified further inflamed the already agitated ego of the old politician who felt he was being sidelined by a less deserving candidate.<sup>69</sup>

This rivalry finally came to an explosive head when Sulla's command to put down a rich eastern kingdom was taken away from him and transferred to the control of Marius. Marius had used his political weight to curry favors with the senate and schemed to find a way to injure the reputation of Sulla, and what injury could be worse than taking away a command that would've enriched Sulla and expanded his client base.<sup>70</sup> When Marius was given command of Sulla's legions under threat of reprisals, the men in these legions loyal to their general murdered the tribunes sent to deliver this order.<sup>71</sup> This was the final straw for both these rivals and the cohesiveness of the Republic, it was civil war, and for the first time a war between two Roman generals was about to begin.

#### **Section 4: So, it Begins**

In a way, we can see that in some ways Marius' military reforms unintentionally led directly to Sulla's army being more loyal to their adored general than their replacement commander Marius. The legions found their loyalty given to their commander and not the demands of the state therefore acting in a way that shocked the Romans, murdering elected officials sent to deliver legal demands. This meant for Sulla that they would follow him anywhere he wanted to lead them, including the walls of Rome itself, and follow him they did. Sulla had known that this client-patron status was going to be put to good use and the soldiers who followed him also profited in his victories were being denied the same spoils he was, so

---

<sup>69</sup> Plutarch, *Caius Marius*, ch. 33, sec. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Plutarch, *Sulla*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916), ch. 8, sec. 4.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, chapter 9, section 1.

Sulla set off to raise his legions for war. This of course was not taken lightly by Marius that he was yet again being disobeyed by a subordinate he intended to take action against this treason. Further than this the tribunes he had killed were close personal friends of Marius and were firmly in his client base supporting his every move. Marius' response was to kill every known pro-Sulla politician and influential individual in the city while stealing their property and supporters in the senate chair held the rest of the politicians hostage.<sup>72</sup>

Sulla during these purges had collected his followers and loyal veterans and he headed back towards the city. For the Romans, nothing was certain except this was not going to be resolved in a peaceable way, and everyone on both sides feared the outcome. For those who supported neither side entirely or wanted to prevent any more bloodshed had realized that Marius was only beginning to clean house and envoys were sent to Sulla on his march to Rome. These "envoys met him on the road and asked him why he was marching with armed forces against his country. "To deliver her from her tyrants," he replied."<sup>73</sup> This message was clear, he related himself to his predecessors, such as Opimius or even Marius, and he intended to solve this in the same way. The major difference between Sulla and those who came before was that he was about to break the most important law in the *mos maiorum*, bringing an army to the gates of Rome. For the senators who tried to act as mediators in this conflict, they displayed another shift in power in the Republic. Just as the old order of the senate had regained power with Marius at their side, it swiftly this slipped away into the hands of the same military leaders who restored it.

Upon approaching the gates, Sulla had been able to break into the city and quickly drove Marius from the city as many of his supporters fled into the countryside to avoid the reprisals for

---

<sup>72</sup> Plutarch, *Sulla*, ch. 9, sec. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 7, sec. 57.

killing the friends of Sulla. If he had really intended to, Sulla could have done so and then eradicated everyone not totally loyal to his faction and made himself king, and under his rule ended the Republic. Instead, he wanted to prove that he was in fact no tyrant, and he was another Cincinnatus, a humble military man coming to the rescue of his home. To ensure the senate that he had no intention of a great purge or mass amounts of violence, he compiled a small list of names, including Marius, that had to die. Further than this Sulla allowed candidates who were unfavorable to him from the opposing party to stand for and be elected consulship one of them being Cinna, who would be key in causing even more violence in the city.<sup>74</sup> For those left in Rome this seemed to prove that he had no intention of creating a tyranny and truly was the Cincinnatus of his time. With them convinced, he was able to rally the remaining Sullans and moderates to move against Marius.

One law that Sulla had passed after his capture of the city was preventing votes that would normally be presented to a plebiscite and instead disallowed them to vote on anything before the senate could. This effectively killed the power of the tribunes to propose laws and pander to the popular support of the masses and further expanding the power of the senate by adding three hundred more nobles to the rolls.<sup>75</sup> These reforms by Sulla rolled back all of the progress that had been made by the *Populares* and in turn strengthen the government to prevent other reformers from trying to expand their power base while Marius was exiled. For Sulla and his supporters this restored the powers that were originally held in the senate and attempted to save the Republic by looking to the past.

---

<sup>74</sup> Plutarch, *Sulla*, ch. 10, sec. 4.

<sup>75</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 7, sec. 59.



### **Section 3: The Four Masters of Rome**

While Sulla tried to keep the peace his efforts were futile, and even though Marius was in exile the consul Cinna saw an opportunity to take control of the situation away from the *optimates* and back into the hands of the reformers. During this time the command that Sulla was supposed to have in the east had gone unappointed, and unrest along the borders broke out into an invasion from modern day Turkey along with a Greek revolution. This meant for the time being, Cinna who was a member of the Marian faction wanted to expand the voting rights of the Italic citizens again, therefore aligning more supporters in the peninsula to himself and to Marius. This left an opportunity open for his faction to gain the upper hand in the region as Sulla had to go east to deal with uprisings in the east. The defense of Rome was left to Cinna's co-consul Octavius. During this time Marius had been dwelling throughout the Republic and seeing an opportunity for return, he headed back to Italy. Cinna's Italian plan had worked and effectively raised the masses of Italian veterans and peasants who flocked to his banner. The future was no longer solely in the hands of Sulla, who now preoccupied with Asia had enemies on two fronts.<sup>76</sup> Looking at the power dynamic now, there was the legal ruler in Sulla, Octavius had the city, Cinna had the Italians, and Marius had many loyal veterans. The Republic already teetering on the verge of collapse was being pulled in four directions.

The situation for the elites worsened when Marius returned to Italy and was able to raise a huge force from the loyal Etruscans<sup>77</sup> who were composed of his former veterans and those whose rights were expanded under Marius and Cinna's demand. This grouping of entirely loyal clients to Marius were happy now to use violence against those who had denied them their rights

---

<sup>76</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 8, sec. 64.

<sup>77</sup> This area is just north of Rome, in modern day Tuscany, these people ruled the Italian peninsula before they were conquered by the rise of the Romans, now they marched to liberate Rome from Sulla under Marius.

and usurp the old order of Rome in the name of their liberator. Many of these veterans being Etruscan were not bound by the same *mos maiorum* that some of his Roman clients would be held to as the terror that Marius intended to unleash needed a certain level of animosity towards Romans and an uncaring stance towards their customs.

This army then moved southward and combined with that of Cinna, who was not idle and continued to build upon his loyal Italian clients and the reform minded Romans. They then set about forming a huge army able to move with force against Rome.<sup>78</sup> The position for the pro-Sulla side seemed unwinnable, they held the city, but their forces did not seem strong enough to hold against the Cinna-Marian alliance, and the Republic seemed lost. With Sulla a world away, the reformers swept towards Rome which upon their second real attack the city caved and agreed to surrender to Cinna. Following this Marius refused to enter the city unless his banishment and those targeted by Sulla was lifted, and thus the tide had yet again turned in favor of the reformers who now had Sulla declared an enemy of the state. When Cinna had entered the city he promised to not cause any kind of violence or disturbance as the people and remaining senate were afraid that he was going to unleash the same violence that Marius had. Cinna's words hoped to quell the fears and anxiety of those in the city, and he further promised to keep the property of everyone intact, even his enemies.<sup>79</sup> This was a blatant lie as himself and Marius were about to unleash a reign of terror against the Romans the likes of which they had never seen before and set the tone for the remainder of the Republic.

From this point on it was clear that the Republic was in the worst crisis it had ever faced. If there could be one moment in the Republic's history so far that there was no point of return it

---

<sup>78</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 8, sec. 67.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, book 1, chapter 8, section 70-71.

was going to be then and there. After the constant assassinations by the senatorial elite against the reformists in the city it was no surprise that blood was going to be shed regardless of promises when they entered the city. Marius had unleashed his army on the richer section of the city allowing them to plunder and kill anyone who was not a loyal supporter of the occupiers and they devastated those who lived in the city. His soldiers systematically ransacked mostly the homes of the senators killing anyone who had stayed behind and not fled. One target of this violence was the consul Octavius who refused to leave the city. When he was arrested the soldiers promptly executed, beheaded, and paraded his head in the forum. Marius' death squads were ruthless and made sure that they were effectively killing and looting everyone who had ever opposed their general. No one had violated the *mos maiorum* in this way before, as a consul and Roman general murdering another consul and ransacking the city they claimed to be liberating.<sup>80</sup>

The terror had become so out of hand that even Marius' friends and supporters became terrified of him, avoiding him at all costs to try and avoid accidentally offending Marius. Though Cinna made no attempts to stop the violence it seemed that it was most perpetrated by Marius and his followers who sought vengeance against those who had banished them and had previously hurt their efforts at reforms. Cinna in a word could have easily ended this violence, but if his enemies were being eradicated by Marius who would take the blame, he saw no reason to change this.<sup>81</sup> When this terror was over Cinna and Marius were the unchallenged leaders of Rome, as the only influential people left in the city were their friends and supporters and their clients had essentially taken over the city. With the political situation secure they made ready to make war against Sulla, who was still dealing with the eastern rebellions.

---

<sup>80</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 8, sec. 70-71.

<sup>81</sup> Plutarch, *Caius Marius*, ch. 43, sec. 6.

#### **Section 4: The Return of Sulla**

As with any plan seemingly to go perfect shortly after Cinna and Marius were elected as the new consuls, Marius died a natural death. This left Cinna in 86 BC the last man standing in Italy and he was ready to start making moves eastward. In the east Sulla celebrated a series of military victories that helped reign Greece back into the fold and therefore was able to better consolidate his position for the upcoming third act of the civil war against Cinna, and both sides were getting ready for their final showdown.<sup>82</sup> It was clear that there was no longer any option for any of the people involved to just lay down their arms and go back to normal after the bloodshed that had come before. No matter who won the upcoming battle nothing would be the same and even though Sulla was negotiating with the senate, Cinna knew that he had to begin to rein in his army of Italians and prepare to meet the veterans returning from the conflict in Asia. When his preparations were complete, Cinna began to cross the Adriatic Sea. On the crossing to meet Sulla in Greece, Cinna's progress was stymied by a storm. Through his own impatience and incompetence half of his fleet and army sunk to the bottom of the sea. The men he brought with him promptly turned on him after realizing his ineptitude and murdered him ending his rule just before it was able to even contest Sulla.<sup>83</sup> Thus Sulla had been able to defeat Marius, Cinna, and Octavius without even having to leave the profitability of Greece, as fortune seemed to smile on the *optimates* again.<sup>84</sup>

While Cinna and Marius were generally self-interested tyrants as their opponents described them, they did try to address many of the problems that allowed individuals like them

---

<sup>82</sup> Plutarch, *Sulla*, ch. 19, sec. 6.

<sup>83</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 9, sec. 78.

<sup>84</sup> The luck that Sulla enjoyed were believed by to come from Fortuna herself, and that the gods were blessing his campaigns.

to gain power in the first place. Many of the political actions he implemented were aimed at healing the Republic and trying to mend the problems between the military and the class distinctions that those before him had attempted. While he is unlike them due to the sheer brutality that he was more than comfortable using to get his way, looking backwards it is not surprising following the legacy of the Gracchi and the fate they met. The fact that his clients and supporters were going to be more likely to use the same violence that had been used against them should not have come as a surprise to the senate, but since they were so concerned with history, those making it were often overlooked. Cinna was no different, he was a proponent of expanding the political sphere of Rome to those who had served the nation for generations in the Italian peninsula. While Cinna and Marius were extremely aggressive in the way they went about their business they seemed to have been left little choice as the political spectrum had turned into a kill or be killed environment. This was not the same Republic that Brutus proclaimed after the fall of the kings, but there was still hope that if Sulla was able to restore order and follow the word that he did not intend to be a tyrant.

At this time as well, politics changed. It was no longer *optimates* and *populares*, but for the duration of the civil war it was pro-Sulla or pro-Cinna, or whatever candidate the individual was aligned with. This was important as these politics shifted from alliance of politics and allegiance to the state where now both were being leant to a single individual. In the Republic's client-patron relationship hierarchy, the top was always the Republic itself, and at the end of the day the state's stability was often more important. When the Marian reforms were enacted and the army gave their allegiance solely to their commander over the state, this bled into every level of society and especially politics. This meant that now not only did a patron influence their client's political perception, but they also now controlled it as almost miniature kings. Marius

had his own court of totally devoted followers who went as far as to kill noble Roman citizens, Sulla marched on the city of Rome and these broke every sacred piece of the *mos maiorum*. This changed the game completely, as the state still existed, but it existed in the hands of individuals instead of its own acting body. Marius and Cinna were Rome itself when they held the city and without them, there had to be someone else put into place to replace them, and Sulla saw himself as that individual as he made plans to retake the city for the second time.

### **Section 5: No Greater Friend, No Worse Enemy**

The Cinnan faction was now in disarray, their two leading figures were dead, the army had turned on them and now they had to prepare for the return of Sulla. In effect their resistance had been broken and was trying to reassemble itself throughout Italy under Cinna's co-consul Carbo, who had replaced Marius. While at first, the party was struggling to hold together, he was able to gain support from the Italians through Cinna's enfranchisement. After the end of his consulship, he retained a leading position in the party essentially taking over for Cinna and controlling the city's politics. For those commoners who had supported Marius and his party they knew that if Sulla was going to return, they were going to have to face his wrath in essence forcing them to align Carbo. For Sulla while he was gaining support from his victories and so far peaceable nature, the fight was not over for him yet, as this coalition of the masses, Italians, and politicians were ready to rally against him. Realizing the threat that was waiting for him across the Adriatic, time was of the essence before they could consolidate their power and Sulla set sail for Italy.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 9, sec. 78-81.

For the Romans this was a terrifying concept, and many believed that Sulla was ready to declare himself a king and end the Republic. He had violated the sanctity of the city once and was ready to do it again. This time his return was more alarming as the two leaders who people believed could stop him was dead, and those who remained had participated in the murder of his clients and friends. The fears were exacerbated by omens that signaled the end of the Roman world as they knew it.

“Sights terrible and unexpected were observed by many, both in public and in private, throughout all Italy. Ancient, awe-inspiring oracles were remembered. Many monstrous things happened. A mule gave birth to a colt. A pregnant woman was delivered of a viper instead of a baby. There was a severe earthquake divinely sent and some of the temples in Rome were thrown down (the Romans gave altogether too much attention to such things). The Capitol, that had been built by the kings 400 years before, burned down, and nobody could discover the cause of the fire. All things seemed to point to a succession of slaughters, to the conquest of Italy and of the Romans themselves, to the capture of the city, and a change in the form of government.”<sup>86</sup>

These signs of disaster were sent by the gods as a divine warning for what was going to happen when Sulla returned. While many of the signs do not mean much to the modern reader, the context to the Romans were exceptional and created a mass panic throughout their holdings.

While the reasoning for these fears had been real, the reality of Sulla’s return was not as bad as it had seemed, as he had disallowed his army to plunder, and was even able to turn some of the Italians and moderate factions to his side. Two figures who were growing in power and were ready to learn from Sulla were Gnaeus Pompey and Marcus Crassus, both joined his side and would be instrumental in the later part of the Republic. He was not completely uncontested as the two new consuls raised armies and prepared to meet Sulla and block him from marching on Rome a second time to save the Republic.<sup>87</sup> They had failed as Sulla had thrown them back to

---

<sup>86</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 9, sec. 83.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, book 1, chapter 9, section 82.

the city, and upon reaching the gates he crushed the armies with the help of Crassus crashing into their back. After his victory, his armies began massacring all those who had attempted to stop him from taking the city sparing only a few Romans, but no Italians.<sup>88</sup> Those in the city quickly realized that “in the matter of tyranny, there had been an exchange, but not a deliverance.”<sup>89</sup> Another Marius, but just from the other side of the political aisle, and those who had helped Marius and Cinna, were now under the rule of the man whose friends and family they had killed and robbed.

While Sulla and his allies had crushed or killed all of his military enemies, some of the generals were still left alive and more politicians needed to be attended to. One of the first who needed to go was the son of Marius, obviously a staunch opponent of Sulla in favor of his father’s politics but committed suicide rather than be captured. When his body was found he was decapitated, and his head paraded through the city.<sup>90</sup> This Sulla was a very different one than had been seen on his first march to the city, and even when he first returned. Looking back at the time of the Gracchi, political violence in the city was not uncommon and was quite the opposite, as more than once parties had started brawls in the city in an attempt to wipe out another party. With Sulla, it was very different because he conquered Rome, he had not caused unrest in the city from battling gangs, he was using his army of clients to occupy the city.

To make matters even worse he decided that instead of needing the sanction of the Senate to restore order as Opimius had done, or even the trials that some other leading figures had tried, Sulla was going to simply bypass all the established laws and use his military to directly go after those that remained. In the first day of his occupation a list of eighty names went up of those

---

<sup>88</sup> Appian *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 10, sec. 93.

<sup>89</sup> Plutarch, *Sulla*, chapter 30, section 4.

<sup>90</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 10, sec. 94.



who needed to die, and many people expected this to be it, if Sulla truly was no tyrant. The next day, two hundred and twenty more, and the next day, even more with the added threat the he had forgotten some enemies, leaving an open ended answer to the question of who was to be purged. These lists, known as proscription lists, would be nailed in the forum, and if one was to find their name on the list it was open season, everyone was expected to treat you as an enemy of the state.<sup>91</sup> The reality of the situation set in for the senate very quickly, adapt to Sulla's demands or be purged and robbed.

To ensure that those who opposed him no longer had any supporters he decided that even the clients of Marius or Cinna were going to go down with their dead patrons.<sup>92</sup> Another telltale sign of the way that the Republic was changing is the occasional apolitical reasoning to proscribing a person. Some knights were being killed solely because they had wealth and this money could be used to pay clients or Sulla's soldiers. Further than this those who did the killing were paid a bounty and allowed to keep some of the spoils from the dead person's estate, a very profitable venture for all involved.<sup>93</sup> One such person was Crassus, who was whispering in the ear of Sulla to add more names to the list, namely those whose property he coveted and sought to profit from, and although Sulla did not approve, he did not stop him.<sup>94</sup>

For those who had opposed Sulla, they had no chance of ever going back to the Republic and figures such as Carbo whose resistance had been long since dissolved, fled into exile to be hunted by Sulla's cronies. Carbo himself would be tracked down in Africa by Pompey himself

---

<sup>91</sup> Plutarch, *Sulla*, ch. 31, sec. 3.

<sup>92</sup> This number is highly disputed, due to the sheer length and scope of the purges that occurred. Plutarch estimated that in the early purges about 520 people died on the first few days, Appian estimates that overall, 40 senators and 1,600 knights were put to death (*The Civil Wars*, book 1, chapter 11, section 95) and in another passage states the end result was as high as fifteen former consuls, 90 senators, and 2,600 knights (Ibid, chapter 12, section 103).

<sup>93</sup> Plutarch, *Sulla*, ch. 31, sec. 6.

<sup>94</sup> Plutarch, *Crassus*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916), ch. 6, sec. 7.

with some of his supporters ending up in Sicily, and Sulla's orders were to execute them on the spot. At the time that Pompey had carried out this order, Carbo was an elected consul of Rome, and Sulla technically held no position in the government as his term as governor had expired.<sup>95</sup> This meant an unelected citizen had executed one of the dual heads of state without even a trial. While Tribunes had been executed before, such as the Gracchi, a consul being murdered by someone holding no legal power was an extent of violence that had never happened before. Even with the Gracchi a commission before the senate had decided they had to die, but this was the decision of one person determining who would die based upon their opinion regardless of what anyone with legal power might say or do.

While individuals were profiting from Sulla's proscriptions, the Republican world around them seemed to die in the hands of those who were self-proclaimed liberators of tyranny. With Sulla's proscription lists in full swing his next move was to consolidate his powers politically and legally now that he held the influence to do so. This is where the importance of the role of dictator comes into Sulla's story as the office had been left dormant for some hundred years as there had not been a crisis great enough to warrant the election of a dictator, including the civil war that Sulla had just won. To make himself legitimate he wrote to the senate asking to be made dictator, not just for the normal six-month period, but for as long he saw fit to rule.<sup>96</sup> This meant that the man who had just proscribed a large portion of the upper and middle classes was going to be granted total power over life, property, and status of all Romans without possibility of prosecution. This included nullifying anything else he had done in the past that could be considered criminal. For those who were going to vote on this, rejecting Sulla would be a death

---

<sup>95</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, ch. 11, sec. 95.

<sup>96</sup> Plutarch, *Sulla*, ch. 33, sec. 1.

sentence they would vote on themselves, so they let it pass unanimously.<sup>97</sup> If the Republic was still alive at this point, it was entering a state of comatose, its teeth had been taken away by the civil war and its head replaced by Sulla, the end wasn't near anymore, it was here.

### **Section 6: The Reign of Sulla and the Aftermath**

For Sulla to put his spin on the Republic, he needed to neuter all of the positions that were able to contest the senatorial elite that he was a part of. One of the most important reforms he did was taking away the power of the Tribunes, the position that empowered the plebs, and even more importantly, the reformers. To break their power, he removed their veto abilities while also preventing them from proposing any new legislation.<sup>98</sup> With the position limited, Sulla also intended to limit the individual power of those who would stand in this plebian position by banning them from ever holding another office, making the position one of the most desirable for those entering public life to one that ended their career.<sup>99</sup> These pieces of legislation passed by Sulla effectively ended the threat of reformers being able to sway the people to pass anti-senate bills. Sulla had hoped by doing this that people like the Gracchi, Marius, and Cinna would now not be able to rise through the social ranks into the upper echelon and those who believed they could be would now were going to be blocked from doing anything meaningful.

Furthermore, he passed laws limiting the terms that different positions were allowed to stand for. This included limitations on term as consul, magistrate, and governor to one election per 10 years, severely weakening the power of people in government from growing too strong

---

<sup>97</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 11, sec. 99.

<sup>98</sup> Livy, *Perioche*, trans. Jona Lendering, (Livius.org, 1995), chapter 89, section 3.

<sup>99</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 11, sec. 100.

through the influence and wealth they gain from consecutive runs. Then to maximize his reach he added new senators to replace those killed during the civil war and his purges giving even more politicians to lend weight to his ideas. This senate packing and limiting individual power allowed Sulla to consolidate his own strength in politics as he was now the only one allowed to be constantly in a government position. To finalize his stance he needed more non-politicians to back him in the middle and lower classes so he freed the slaves of those who were proscribed and gave land in Italy to his veterans so they could start farms.<sup>100</sup> These individuals who had been bribed with land and freedom now worked for Sulla as his personal clients giving him a base of wealth, manpower, and political power. For the senate itself its powers were greatly expanded as positions were limited to the nobles and the Assemblies of the people headed by tribunes were weakened. This balance of power favored Sulla as the senate was easily controlled through his nepotism or fear of his wrath. The government was now completely controlled by the senate and in turn by Sulla, and this meant that the nation seemed to be backsliding into the days of the Kings, with Sulla as the first new monarch.

Often time in Rome, right when reforms seem to be happening or changes are being made, nothing is as it seems. Sulla was presented with two paths: to be king, or a restoration of the Republic, and he choose the Republic. While everything was lined up for him to take total power for the rest of his life, he stepped down as dictator about a year after taking it, becoming a consul instead.<sup>101</sup> This was another event in Roman history that is somewhat strange, as every indication that Sulla appeared to be setting himself up to be king was there, but instead he chose not to. Someone else in his position could easily have become king of Rome, but in the ways of

---

<sup>100</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 11, sec. 100.

<sup>101</sup> Plutarch, *Sulla*, ch. 34, sec. 3.

*mos maiorum*, especially that of Cincinnatus, Sulla instead decided to slowly pull back from his power. While his time as Dictator and the shift away from this did not go smoothly as he did have to use violence to secure elections, he did resign the position.<sup>102</sup> Sulla in power was no doubt a tyrant but the power he was given was relinquished back to the senate which he had taken them from in the first place, ending the position that he himself had built. After this Sulla simply went back to the countryside to his estates and lived a mostly quiet life writing before he died a natural death.<sup>103</sup>

With all of the legislation that Sulla had passed, and all of the actions he took to secure the Republic, all seemed all at first. Almost instantaneously after the death of Sulla, the Republic returned to its old ways, as the two Consuls, one of the Sullan faction and the other of the reformer party were fighting yet again. It would seem the glue that held together the Republic was truly the fear of Sulla, and after his retirement the fear of his return. Further than this his legacy of his reforms to try and save the Republic slowly filtered out and died, as he controlled the system through fear and made quite a lot of enemies who were happy to pull down his legacy as soon it was safe to do so. The two consuls almost instantly began to take arms against each other as one of them, Marcus Lepidus,<sup>104</sup> intended to overturn Sulla's anti-Italian laws and restore to them the land that he had taken from them to give to his legions. His co-consul Catulus Capitolinus, tried to block him and both sides prepared their armies for another civil war, just after the death of Sulla. This was ended quickly as Catulus quickly defeated Lepidus who died shortly after the battle in which he attempted to march on the capitol, giving Catulus the

---

<sup>102</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 1, ch. 11, sec. 101.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, book 1, ch. 12, sec. 105.

<sup>104</sup> The father of the Triumvir Marcus Lepidus.

cognomen Captiolinus.<sup>105</sup> It was clear that the memory of Sulla had made a big splash in the Republican pond, but its ripples faded fast.

While not all was well in the post-Sullan Republic, it was even worse in his own party, especially with two of his most ardent supporters, Crassus and Pompey, who were ready to overturn his laws. Pompey was a staunch supporter of Sulla, but he was more of a people's champion politician than a noble, and during his shared consulship with Crassus they had restored the role of the Tribunes to the status they were before.<sup>106</sup> It would seem that those aligned to Sulla during the civil war only did so because they knew the consequences of doing anything else. Yet again, the Republic was unable to reform itself. It seemed that no matter which way the politics would go, and no matter how far they went, they would always end up right back where they were to begin with only for all of the trouble to begin again worse each time.

---

<sup>105</sup> Livy, *Perioche*, book 90, sec. 1-4.

<sup>106</sup> Plutarch, *Pompey*, tran. Bernadotte Perrin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917), ch. 22, sec. 3.

## **Chapter 4: The First Triumvirate**

In the wake left by Sulla's death, there were two members of his party showing aptitude for taking over the party, Pompey Magnus and Marcus Licinius Crassus, both men aligned to the *optimates*. As Pompey had begun to overturn some of the Sullan reforms he became more aligned with the love of the people, a caterer to the masses and had strong ties to the military. Crassus on the other hand was the rich aristocratic type who aligned himself with the senate and the elite, and while these two often bickered and fought, their alliance was a stabilizing force within the Republic.<sup>107</sup> The fighting between each other was at some points nerve wracking, but what helped to build up confidence in the government was their ability to steer clear of what Marius and Sulla had done, their differences stayed political.

The power of Crassus at this time relied heavily on his ability to control all things financial in the Republic. During the post-war period, the destruction caused by the civil war had broken the economy it was in a major recession. To make matters even worse, there were influential persons such as Crassus hoarding as much of the real estate as they possibly could causing rents to rise and less property to be available to those outside of this inner circle composed from wealthy individuals, and the Gracchi were rolling in their graves.<sup>108</sup> This was not the only way Crassus and others were making money, as loan-sharking during these trying times was such a common practice that most people in the nobility and middle class became heavily indebted. This debt continued to grow as those who had debts couldn't pay for it, and calls for a general debt forgiveness became regular, and this escalated politically. This debt was

---

<sup>107</sup> Plutarch, *Pompey*, ch. 22, sec. 3.

<sup>108</sup> Plutarch, *Crassus*, ch. 2, sec. 4-5.

used to essentially force people into clientship of those who they owed money to, and this created a whole new class of patrons.<sup>109</sup>

While there had been very little change in this post-Sulla world for the time being, all seemed well and ready to get back on track towards the last few hundred years of Roman history. This also meant that some of those who were outlaws were beginning to creep back into Roman politics after being outlawed by Sulla. One such returner was Gaius Julius Caesar, whose aunt had been married to Gaius Marius, and further than this Caesar had married the daughter of Cinna. This therefore meant that he was guilty by association and had to go into exile for years.<sup>110</sup> With Sulla dead, those who he had harangued but not condemned were allowed to return to public life in the city, giving rise to old political parties and new ideas.

### **Section 1: The Catiline Conspiracy**

While all seemed well in Rome for now, there was problems brewing just beneath the surface. Some of the more hardline Sulla supporters were brewing a conspiracy led by one Lucius Catiline sought to restore the style of government crafted by their patron through means of force, and Catiline saw himself as the man to lead the dictatorship.<sup>111</sup> These set of circumstances were one of the few instances, save Saturnius, that there was tangible proof at attempting to create an imperial system. With Sulla for example, his takeover was a reaction to another person's actions, and this was not originally his plan. For Catiline he fully intended to make himself a kind of king, with the power of Sulla, but to not give it up again. What instigated all of this fell solely on his past bad behavior preventing him from holding the consulship that he

---

<sup>109</sup> Sallust, *The Catiline Conspiracy*, trans. John Watson, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1899), ch. 21.

<sup>110</sup> Plutarch, *Caesar*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), ch. 1, sec. 1.

<sup>111</sup> Sallust, *The Catiline Conspiracy*, ch. 5.



desired and to right this he wanted to kill the elected consuls and the entire senate.<sup>112</sup> If there ever was a break from the *mos maiorum*, killing the heads of state and the entire senate out of poor political sportsmanship would have to take the cake.

While this clearly was one major step further than Sulla or even Marius could have ever imagined, he was following a path that had been set by both. He intended to take power by killing those who opposed him like his predecessors had done but had no intention of restoring some piece of the Republic he had thought had fallen. To gain support for his coup, he began to make some very lucrative promises, including debt forgiveness, beginning new proscriptions to kill and steal from the rich landlords and loan-sharks, and offices.<sup>113</sup> For those suffering under the weight of the economic downturn, killing the rich people who put them into debt like in the days of Sulla was probably something they would have very much liked to hear. To have a conspiracy of this size, he needed more than influential debtors, he needed soldiers, and to gain these fighting men he reminded them how life was like under Sulla, and that he was the heir to Sulla's legacy.<sup>114</sup> Many of these soldiers had fallen onto hard times with the economic downturn and their farms being pushed out by landlords such as Crassus, but with Sulla in charge they were allowed to plunder and move up in the world, so they needed a new patron to guide them.<sup>115</sup>

To ensure a Sullan-styled restoration, they intended to murder the consul Marcus Tullius Cicero, and by force of arms control the city and then purge all of their enemies. This proceeding was intimately following in the footsteps of Sulla and Marius, and when it all failed

---

<sup>112</sup> Sallust, *The Catiline Conspiracy*, ch. 18.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, ch. 21.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 21-22.

<sup>115</sup> Plutarch, *Cicero*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), ch.14, sec. 1.

to go smoothly, he fled and hoped his army was going to be able to finish the plan. This did not happen, as hard evidence against them was found and many of the leaders were executed under the orders of Cicero. Those who survived, including Catiline, attempted to flee but were forced to fight with only a fraction of its original strength. This battle went in favor of Cicero and the Republic, killing Catiline and his forces.<sup>116</sup> This event while ultimately a failure uncovered a hard truth for the Republic, that even just after the post-Sulla age, not all was well no matter how hard the government tried. The path that had been made by Marius and Sulla was going to be copied by everyone and anyone who felt that they could make themselves dictators. With the economic downturn as well, it made it much easier for people like Catiline to find others who needed relief and were willing to go through any means to help relieve this. It became from this point on only a matter of time before someone could place themselves into Sulla's place but decide to not give up the power by following this type of path.

## **Section 2: The Triumvirs**

With Catiline gone, the major politicians and figures of the day were mainly Crassus, Pompey, Cicero, Cato, and now returned and rising through the ranks, Caesar. These politicians were from all of the spectrum of ideas of the day, but the main contenders were Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus on one side, Cato on the other, and Cicero standing in a somewhat middle position. While the first party were aligned more of necessity than idea, as Pompey being a middle-ground Populist, Caesar a strict populist, and Crassus aligned with the optimates, Cato was a hardcore Roman traditionalist. The first alliance is notably all over the place in normal Roman politics but had joined forces not out of agreeable politics but instead from necessity. While in a sense they

---

<sup>116</sup> Sallust, *The Catiline Conspiracy*, ch. 30.

all hated and undermined each other, none of them were able to make any serious progress without out the support of one another.

This alliance came about because all three men had interests that would be opposed by Cato or had already been. In a kind of irony, the relationship between these three began at the pinnacle of the rivalry between Pompey and Crassus. During the young life of Caesar, he had incurred many debts to creditors he could not pay, which was even more exacerbated during a military stint he had in Spain costing even more money. On his way back from Spain he felt he deserved a triumph and to stand for the consulship after everything he had paid to expand the Republic. When this was denied and his position for being elected consul threatened, he needed to make political allies and Pompey, being spurned by the senate for a land bill he wished to be past, was a likely choice.<sup>117</sup> While this was a strong alliance, it did not have enough power to dominate yet, so a third candidate needed to be found.

The third member of their band was Crassus, although an unlikely friend as his relationship with Pompey was the lowest it had ever been and it is safe to say both men hated each other. While it is not entirely clear how Caesar managed to pull it off, he got these two to reconcile and the three opposites were now politically the same.<sup>118</sup> There was also some connection prior between Caesar and Crassus in that Caesar was one of those who had fallen deeply into debt, as mentioned above and needed someone to help alleviate it. Crassus offered to pay for it beginning their relationship that would eventually mold the triumvirate and essentially turned Caesar into a client.<sup>119</sup> For these three this meant they essentially dominated all sides of Roman society; it was becoming a scary sight for Cato and his party. To Appian, Cato's

---

<sup>117</sup> Plutarch, *Caesar*, ch. 13, sec. 1.

<sup>118</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, ch. 2.

<sup>119</sup> Plutarch, *Caesar*, ch. 12, sec. 1.

aggressive nature pushed them together to form a “tricaranus,” the three headed monster that could not be stopped.<sup>120</sup> The triumvirate brought together the greatest military man in Rome, a populist general favorable to the people, and the richest man in the nation, who could stand against such an alliance?

The answer to that question is themselves, as their alliance was purely for selfish gain, not truly political. While all three had interest to gain from each other, they also had interests in undercutting each other at the same time. While at first they posed a serious threat to the old order, as Caesar was following in the footsteps of his idol Marius by passing populist land reforms backed by the people and the strong arm of the other two, it did not last long.<sup>121</sup> This came from a resurgence of the enmity between Crassus and Pompey who could not stand to see the other do better and their rivalry began to kill the coalition, and in the eyes of Cato, saved the Republic to live another day. As their alliance began to sizzle out and die, all three members went in different directions to regain their lost glory, Caesar to Gaul in the North, Crassus to Syria in the East, and Pompey to stay in Rome. While they had effectively carved the Republic into three parts that they would rule, the alliance on the senate floor was over.<sup>122</sup>

### **Section 3: The Fate of the Triumvirs**

During these final stages of the Triumvirate, Caesar had been given the territory of Cisalpine Gaul in the modern-day Po valley in Northern Italy to be governor. This position came with many perks that allowed him to wage war and gain wealth from these conquests, except this was recently made illegal to curb their power, by Caesar himself. Ignoring his own laws he

---

<sup>120</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, ch. 2, sec. 1.

<sup>121</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves, (New York: Penguin Group, 1957), pg. 9.

<sup>122</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 2, ch. 3.

chose instead to declare war on the neighboring tribes and won a series of victories. This caused Caesar to become immensely popular with the people as he continued to push into Gaul sending money, slaves, and goods back to the people. His wars expanded the Republic into modern day France, Belgium, and Switzerland. These heroic deeds were seen by the masses as the brilliant mind of a great conqueror and hero of the Republic but to Cato and the others they were seen as the wealth gathering and mass pandering of a tyrant. This could not be allowed to go on, so opponents of Caesar attempted to take the consulship, but for the last time, the triumvirate would come together at a conference in Luca. To protect all three of their interests Crassus and Pompey were to stand for consul, and Caesar would be granted an extension to his governorship for five extra years.<sup>123</sup> Further than this, the two consuls also got provinces of their own to rule and to make money from, Crassus in Syria, and Pompey in Spain and Africa.<sup>124</sup> <sup>125</sup> This was their last major move together, and to the *optimates* in the senate, it seemed like three kings had just cut Rome into three kingdoms to rule independently.

For these three supposed kings, their dealings quickly turned hostile and soured beyond recourse. The first tragedy to strike was the death of Pompey's wife Julia, who was Caesar's daughter, severing their last permanent tie and the end of their alliance.<sup>126</sup> Caesar's victories had been dazzling the Republic and the masses who once adored Pompey. For Pompey's ego this was turning him against Caesar and the whisperings of Cato in his ear could not have helped the situation for the triumvirs. Around the same time in Syria an unfortunate series of events occurred that brought an end to the entire triumvirate. This was the death of Crassus, who had

---

<sup>123</sup> Plutarch, *Caesar*, ch. 21, sec. 3.

<sup>124</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 2, ch. 2.

<sup>125</sup> While all three had been given their own provinces to rule, Pompey had decided to govern by proxy, and remained in Rome, acting as the political arm at the end of the triumvirate, giving him an interesting position in the prelude to the second civil war.

<sup>126</sup> Appian *The Civil Wars*, book 2, ch. 2.

been killed during his tenure in Syria. He had attempted to lead a campaign against their neighbors, the Parthians, in modern day Iraq and Iran that ended in disaster. His army was destroyed after constant losses and mutinies with himself being captured and executed.<sup>127</sup> <sup>128</sup> This left the Republic in the hands of the ever-popular Caesar and the growing discontent of Pompey who hated to see anyone rise to his status of popularity. In the same way of Marius and Sulla, two ambitious generals with heavy political weight often lead the Republic down the path of civil war.

#### **Section 4: The Rising Tensions**

The path to war did not come from inside the triumvir itself but was founded in a conflict brewing within the city. The Republic was beginning to come apart the seams that Sulla had tried to sow, and violence was erupting again. Corruption was so commonplace that to be elected you had to pay the right people, or you did not stand a chance in politics. These problems were further enflamed by two leading men in politics, Clodius and Milo. These two had been bitter rivals constantly trying to undercut one another, but Clodius had the love of the people on his side and his populist policies often led to him to amasses client bases that acted as gangs who would assault anyone who opposed his will. One day, while Clodius was traveling, his party happened to pass by Milo heading in the opposite direction, and someone in Milo's party threw a javelin into the back of Clodius nearly killing him on the spot. Knowing the threat of allowing Clodius to now live after this, Milo ordered his party to finish him off and his entire party. When his body arrived in Rome, his wife held the bloodied body in front of the masses who adored him and this mob broke down with rage and anguish at the death of their champion. These masses

---

<sup>127</sup> Plutarch, *Crassus*, ch. 31, sec. 7.

<sup>128</sup> The myth presented with this story is by Cassius Dio in his histories, claiming molten gold was poured down his throat, a fitting end to the greediest and richest man in Rome.

took his body to the senate house, laid down a funeral pyre and burned down the senate house with the body inside.<sup>129</sup>

Caesar was still in Gaul serving as governor when turmoil in the capitol was beginning again as the elected consuls and the four people running for the position were all indicted on charges of bribery to fix the election. There was chaos on the streets, as those still angry with the death of Clodius continued to riot and fight with the locals who tried to stop them. This caused the election to be delayed and the senate clamored again for a dictator to be appointed, and all signs pointed to Pompey, the last of the triumvirs in Rome. The conflict further enflamed the enemies of the populists to demand a strong man, a capable military and political heavy weight to take power, and all eyes were on Pompey.<sup>130</sup> This choice was not unexpected, as Pompey was not idle while his peers were off winning or losing glory throughout the known world but was spending lavishly on creating new structures in the city and dazzling the masses with great games. His popularity was not quite what it had been when Pompey served under Sulla, but he was older, and his attention moved from conquest on the battlefield to conquest in the political arena.

In response to this, Cato the staunch *optimatus* who had been whispering the evils of Caesar in Pompey's ear convinced him that dictator was too much, too tyrannical, and that instead he should be sole consul.<sup>131</sup> Being given this position meant that Pompey answered to no equal but was still bound by the rules of the consulship. This was similar to the role given to Opimius, to restore order in the city at any cost, and quickly Pompey brought up his loyal veterans acting as clients and broke the gangs fighting in the city over Clodius' killing. He then

---

<sup>129</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 2, ch. 3.

<sup>130</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 2, ch. 3.

<sup>131</sup> Plutarch, *Pompey*, ch. 54, sec. 4.

quickly put them on trial and order was restored, with Pompey as the centerpiece of the restored order.<sup>132</sup> Looking at this time period, Pompey was acting as an outstanding citizen by simply following the rules. He adhered to the *mos maiorum* of his office to save the Republic from chaos, as well as preserving in a way the honor of Cincinnatus, the good dictator, although in power though not title. He was the first person given such power in Rome for some time who did not outright abuse it, although if nothing more this acted to enlarge his ego.

The conflict now over in the city, Cato was now determined to get rid of Caesar in Gaul and was ready to use Pompey as the strong arm to do it. This strategy of the *optimates* party, was going to be the same as the Gracchi, use legal means to get rid of political enemies. While this path had worked before against the reformers, this was a very different situation. For the Republic, this was a common error that had been constantly made by both the reformers and the elites alike. The rubber band had at this point been strained by the legacy of the Gracchi and now with Sulla laying the path about how to break the band if someone chose to, the game of politics has changed. For those in charge they were either unable to see it, or in denial of what was happening. This lack of understanding and inability to cope with the necessary changes is the edge Caesar had that finally broke the system.

Hostile but not yet violent politics ruled the day, as a delicate balance of power between those in favor of Caesar and those who sought to prosecute him continued to shift. When Caesar's extended term of governor was expiring, the senate demanded he prepare to lay down his command, but his supporters demanded the same for Pompey. These terms were unacceptable for Pompey because his term had not even come close to ending, but the fears from

---

<sup>132</sup> Plutarch, *Pompey*, ch. 55.



both sides were there if both did not agree to stand down. Whoever disarmed themselves first and returned to private citizens would give the other the power to act as they pleased.<sup>133</sup> This standoff between two of the most powerful, and dangerous political leaders seemed to be bringing the Republic back to the brink yet again but this time, the extreme tension made it seem that either man would make themselves king. The senate then decided that Pompey was there in the city, maybe not the best Republican there was, but surely the lesser of two evils, so they demanded that Caesar step down without any promises of Pompey to do the same.

This was the last straw for the party of Caesar, and a fatal mistake for the old guard. At this time, his loyal army was camped in Northern Italy, and there was no army between himself and Rome. Since the *optimates* did not believe that Caesar would break the most sacred part of the *mos maiorum* and march on Rome, they had been comfortable agitating him as much as they had. This was a fatal error, the same Marius had made with Sulla, and the senate allowed happen with Marius, another time they had refused to believe that the game had changed, and this inability to see this would be life-threatening to the Republic. Regardless of what they believed, this is exactly what Caesar had done, as there was nothing standing between himself and Rome he simply marched on the city and took it without resistance. All of the old guard and some of those even aligned to Caesar, such as Marcus Junius Brutus swiftly fled the city southward before Caesar could arrive.<sup>134</sup>

### **Section 5: The Die is Cast**

For the *optimata* faction this was another fatal error. While it did make sense for them to flee the city, as they had no means to defend themselves and Pompey had to gather his loyal

---

<sup>133</sup> Appian, *The Civil War*, book 1, ch. 4, sec. 27-28.

<sup>134</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pg 16.

client-soldiers, the city was the heart of the Republic. This was the same when Cinna and Sulla were fighting it out, whoever controlled the city had the entire government as well as the economy on their side, plus the legitimacy of their government being placed in the capital. The mistake was not them leaving the city though as what Marius had done to the enemies when he took over could have easily happened again, but they should have been ready for this to happen. Caesar had almost followed the exact same path as the parties in the first civil war, but the other side refused to acknowledge that they needed to be ready for this. This essentially meant that now those who claimed to be the rightful government in Rome had abandoned the city, and now were running with their tails between their legs out of Italy.

Worse than this for the optimates, Caesar had taken the likeness of Marius and Cinna as the rightful heir of the reformers, and with this in mind many of the Italians began to flock to his banner. This meant that the old guard had to make the unthinkable decision of not only abandoning the city to Caesar, but now they had to give up the Italian peninsula. There were a few who refused to leave, such as Domitius Ahenobarbus, who decided to make a last stand in Corfinium<sup>135</sup> where the local population of Italians and his own soldiers turned on him and handed him over to Caesar. This was the same man who intended to have Caesar replaced in Gaul and would have gladly killed Caesar to do so, and knowing what Sulla had done to his enemies he believed his fate was sealed. Instead, everywhere Caesar went he showed clemency towards those who considered themselves his enemies, even allowing them to go to Pompey, no matter how vehemently they opposed him.<sup>136</sup> While this was surely better than what Marius and Sulla had done to their enemies, it made surrendering to the will of Caesar even easier for those

---

<sup>135</sup> Near modern day Corfinio, Abruzzo, Italy.

<sup>136</sup> Plutarch, *Caesar*, ch. 34-35.

who wanted to oppose war at all costs. Fighting in the first civil war was that much more important to continue because in the end it was a matter of life and death for all involved. This time was different, Caesar presented himself as a merciful middle ground, claiming to want to restore his legal rights and not to ever become a tyrant.

This was where Caesar was better at winning an internal war than Sulla, because his legacy was not going to be one that was built upon the bodies of purged enemies, but one as the liberator of the oppressed. While this was great for everyone involved, Caesar still had to win for it to make any difference. Pompey still had many friends inside and outside the Republic, with his many military victories and presence felt throughout the Republic the kings of the east who rallied to his cause showed that both sides had the same kind of conflict of Marius and Sulla. The same applied to Caesar as he used auxiliaries from the tribes who allied themselves to him, not to their overlords in Rome.<sup>137</sup> Further than this those who fought in each army, both Roman and under Roman rule, stood in battle not as Republicans, but as Caesar's and Pompey's soldiers.

For months the two armies continue to harry each other without either side being a clear victor, until the battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC, where the two finally met face to face ready to end the conflict. This battle initially was in Pompey's favor, he had Caesar outnumbered, backed into a corner, and stuck with little supplies. In terms of military tactics Pompey should have and could have just waited Caesar out, and won. This was not how history happens though as Pompey was being nagged by his staff and the senate to go in, full force, and crush Caesar. Doing such, Pharsalus was lost, Pompey's army shattered, and Caesar victorious.<sup>138</sup> For the

---

<sup>137</sup> Plutarch, *Pompey*, ch. 64, sec. 3-4.

<sup>138</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 2, ch. 11.

*optimates*, all seemed lost as Cicero and Brutus switched sides and enjoyed the clemency that Caesar was offering for all of those who had been defeated. Those who refused to give up scattered to different parts of the Republic to try and raise a fresh army to continue opposition with Cato in Africa and Pompey heading to Egypt.

This excursion was short lived for the remaining *optimates*, and the resistance began to fail. The first blow they received was Pompey's execution as he fled to Egypt. As he had been good friends with the current pharaoh's father, he believed that Egypt would be a safe haven for his cause.<sup>139</sup> This was not the case, for when he landed in Egypt, he was greeted by a small boat and was greeted by the pharaoh and when he came ashore he was promptly executed, and his body burned on the coast.<sup>140</sup> When Caesar had arrived in pursuit, the head of Pompey had been presented to him and he flew into a fit of rage and anguish at seeing a man who had been his great friend, but also great enemy treated in such a way. Egypt at this time was under the rule of Rome and supplied grain to the capitol, so stability there was of the essence. During this time the throne of the pharaoh was being contested by his sister Cleopatra, and Caesar tried to act as a mediator to keep the peace. In failing to do so he thoroughly agitated the local population, and he was bogged down in Egypt for some months while the civil war still raged on throughout the Republic.<sup>141</sup>

While Pompey had been the strong personality that held up the resistance to Caesar, he was not alone. Cato and another senator Scipio had busied themselves raising new troops in

---

<sup>139</sup> During this time period Egypt had been an ally of Rome to avoid being totally annexed by the growing nation. Many of the excursions done by the Romans into the Middle East, including by Pompey had either assistance from or was used as a base in Egypt. Plutarch's *Lives* about Pompey details parts of this and his friendship with the local government, but Egypt had always tried to stay with whoever was most likely to win, regardless of previous allegiance.

<sup>140</sup> Plutarch, *Pompey*, ch. 79-80.

<sup>141</sup> Plutarch, *Caesar*, ch. 48, sec. 2.

Africa while Caesar had been stuck dealing with civil war in Egypt.<sup>142</sup> The Republic was not well in any sense, as Marc Antony had been left in charge of Italy, and while he was a capable and extraordinary general, his political and people skills were severely lacking. In effect, he destabilized the peninsula and was agitating the locals with his incompetence. In the provinces, there was much of the same issues happening. As Pompey had been in charge of Spain and he had sent his clients there to stand in his place, they were still totally devoted to their patron even after his death and were causing trouble to try and avenge their fallen master.<sup>143</sup>

Regrettably for the *optimates* and for the Republic, Caesar survived the ordeals in Egypt and was ready to put an end to the rest of the dissidents. The real end of the *optimates* came in the death of first Scipio then Cato. Scipio had assumed command of anyone who would fight against Caesar in Africa, but these forces were nowhere near as experienced as Caesar's and were quickly dispatched. Scipio refusing to bend the knee to a tyrant chose to commit suicide instead.<sup>144</sup> With the last real pro-Pompey army and navy crushed, Cato fled to the city of Utica,<sup>145</sup> and knowing that his enemy was fast approaching chose the same fate and committed suicide behind the walls before Caesar could arrive.<sup>146</sup> The resistance in Spain by Pompey's clients and then by his sons met the same fate, as they were destroyed. Pompey's eldest son being captured and then beheaded by one of Caesar's generals, and the younger escaping into exile.<sup>147</sup> For those who survived the war, they saw the death of Cato as a noble suicide, and a

---

<sup>142</sup> To the Romans, Africa meant parts of modern-day Libya, to the coast of Morocco, not the continent as we would think of it today.

<sup>143</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 2, ch. 13.

<sup>144</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 2, ch. 14, sec. 95.

<sup>145</sup> In modern day Tunisia, the city no longer exists.

<sup>146</sup> Plutarch, *Cato the Younger*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), ch. 64, sec. 1.

<sup>147</sup> Plutarch, *Caesar*, ch. 56, sec. 3.

grim comparison to the fate of the Republic. At that moment, many felt that the Republic died with Cato.

### **Section 6: The Second Dictator for Life**

With no more resistance to his rule, Caesar returned to Rome a hero of the people. While Romans killing other Romans was never looked favorable by the populace, the leniency Caesar had given to those who opposed who was unique to those who had power in the city. The only political enemies of him who had died were those who chose that path themselves or were murdered without his consent. Regardless of whether this was a foolish mistake or not, it had worked out well for Caesar at the time. Even with those plotting his demise in the shadows, in the light Cato had been wrong, the Republic was not in mourning at its own death, but instead it was rejoicing at the end of the bloodshed brought on by two civil wars. That is what Caesar's masterwork of propaganda would make it seem like. Instead of this being the case the death of Cato marked the end of the Republic, not a final end per se, but the beginning of the transitional period of the Republic. There was barely a chance to come back, and those who still believed in the Republic attempted with everything they had to overturn the shift for almost a hundred years, but this was as many believed the final nail in the coffin.

With Caesar back in Rome, it was time for him to set the path for what was going to happen next. Instead of taking the path of Sulla and eradicating those who opposed him, Caesar instead intended to try and integrate them into the restored system that was built around him. This is where Sulla and Caesar were much the same, it was still the Republic, but it was one centered around themselves, with Sulla's being built on blood and Caesar's on clemency. To ensure this legacy Caesar he was named dictator for a period of ten years to finalize his plans in recreating this new Republic, and then later appointed for life, an unusual appointment but again,

he was not the first.<sup>148</sup> Further than this Caesar intended to reform the entire political system that had begun under Gaius Gracchus, Marius, and now himself.

These reforms were targeted at punishing those who had abused the system and raise those who had played fair or those who were loyal to him. He first passed laws allowing non-Romans into the senate, namely Gallic chieftains who had been granted citizenship for their loyalty to Rome during Caesar's campaigns in the region. Other than this he ordered that a portion of all of those who worked in certain farms had to be freeman in order to break the patrician domination of the countryside with their slave plantations. To reform them even more he added more severe punishments for corrupted politicians and went as far as to ban certain luxury goods that were once available to the upper class.<sup>149</sup> While these reforms were beginning to show themselves as the cure for the ills that had been plaguing the Republic for hundreds of years, it was not meant to be. In the case of every reformer so far, they had come so close to their goal of changing the Republic only to die prematurely before their reforms can be made, Caesar being no exception.

Caesar on the eve of his ability to reform the Republic had been met by conspirators in the Senate house. These senators had been his former opponents during the civil war who he pardoned, and some of them he had even considered close personal friends. The conspirators saw Caesar as the great evil of the Republic still, and even though he had campaigned hard to change their minds and presented himself not as a king, but as a reformer, it had been too much for them to take. He was assassinated on the floor of the Senate, with the conspiracy headed by two senators, Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longinus<sup>150</sup> who claimed that they were the true

---

<sup>148</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pg 35.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, pg. 21.

<sup>150</sup> In most historical contexts he is simply referred to as Cassius, which I will also use.

Republic and that they were committing a tyrannicide, not murder. Plutarch claims that in the Senate house stood a statue of Pompey, who Caesar fell at the base of before dying, an act of seemingly paranormal revenge from the man who died defending the Republic.<sup>151</sup>

Those who killed Caesar truly believed that they had the best interests of the Republic at heart and what they were doing was not only justified, but honorable. After his death it seemed that the day-to-day was going to back to a kind of normal, and the senate even gave honor to the dead dictator but also to those who participated in the killing. This was the work mostly of Marc Antony to try and avoid another all-out civil war, no one would further be punished for their actions nor lose the appointments given to them by Caesar.<sup>152</sup> All was well until the funeral of Caesar, who had left a considerable sum of money to every citizen, enraged the people who had henceforth not stood against the murders. This broke the dam that was holding back their anger, and as his body burned the locals threw everything they could find onto the pyre and began to riot in the streets determined to find the perpetrators and kill them, but failed.<sup>153</sup> Again, the Republic was back to where it was before Caesar, a violent mess uncertain of its own future. This is where two of Caesar's supporters, one his newly adopted son Octavian, and his second in command Marc Antony, were ready to again to change the game as Caesar had done.

---

<sup>151</sup> Plutarch, *Caesar*, ch. 66, sec. 7.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, ch. 68.

<sup>153</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pg. 41.



## **Chapter 5: The Second Triumvirate**

While the Republic was no longer in the hands of Caesar, the damage was done. The political situation had become too delicate to keep switching back and forth as it had always done between reformers and the old guard. The strain that it had placed itself under two civil wars, two dictators for life, and innumerable citizens and residents dead, there was no going back. Whichever side was going to win, whether it be the new members of the reformers or the old guard, the solution had to be fixed and final. Both sides had reached to the extremes and the middle ground that existed between the civil wars was no longer a viable solution. It had also become hard to continue the notion whether or not the killing of Caesar was a rightful tyrannicide, as he had not yet been given the chance to show his true colors, one way or the other. Since Caesar held the same powers as Sulla and the same positions, it is hard to separate the two being totally different stances, one tyrant and the other not. Since the optimates had Sulla who was on their side, and not a tyrant, it began to seem that killing Caesar was more politically motivated than it was a tyrannicide.

This situation was further exacerbated by the fact that Octavian was now the legal son of Caesar and was going to bear his name.<sup>154</sup> This created a deeper dynamic than even Caesar being the heir to the legacy of Marius had created. For Octavian, Brutus and Cassius were not simply political opponents like Caesar and Pompey had been, but they had murdered his legal father, and to him there could be only one solution: the permanent destruction of them and their party. This was backed by the loyal clients of Caesar who had permeated through a generation,

---

<sup>154</sup> For simplicity I will refer to Octavian as Octavian, but he held many different names through his life. Suetonius refers to him as Octavius and Augustus, other sources as Octavian. For simplicities sake referring to him as Octavian will be easier, even when he assumes the mantle of Octavian Augustus Caesar.

and the vengeful wishes of Antony, and Marcus Lepidus, who adored Caesar and wished to honor his legacy.

### **Section 1: The Rise of the Second Triumvirate**

The problem that Brutus and Cassius overlooked was how popular Caesar had been and how unpopular another civil war looked to the masses. They had just gone through two major wars and Caesar's regime had brought peace and stability to the nation, the first calm the city had seen in some time. Now that he was gone, the way he died, civil war was inevitable yet again. Octavian would now want vengeance for his father whose persona he had adopted fully, and Brutus and Cassius were his targets. For two saviors they were more unpopular than ever, enemies even of the masses, and had to flee instead of receiving the liberators welcome they had expected. With these two in exile, their party began to evaporate, held together only by the orator Cicero. On the other side of the aisle things were not all perfect, as Antony and Octavian wrestled for control of the party, and both began trying to win support by gathering armies of pro-Caesar veterans and clients. On the other side, while the Caesarian party were busy eating one another, the exiled optimates kept themselves busy, building an army. Only a few years had gone by since the end of the last war, they were ready for another one.<sup>155</sup>

After the end of Antony's term as Consul during which Caesar had been killed, he went north to act as governor of Gaul. While this was heavily contested in the senate, he had scraped up as many veterans and loyal friends he could find to create an army on the border of Italy to threaten the capitol, similar to what Caesar had done. Instead of marching on the capitol, he stayed put. This led to the two consuls at the time to assemble an army and march north, with

---

<sup>155</sup> Cicero, *Letters to Friends*, trans. Evelyn Shuckburgh, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1908), family 12, letter 4.

help from Octavian who had become rivaled to Antony and wanted to deal with him before he was able to push south and take Rome. During the battle, the two consuls were both killed but Antony was defeated and managed to escape. With the two other military leaders killed, Octavian gained all the glory from it, and his popularity with the people continued to grow.<sup>156</sup> While Antony's army was mostly crushed himself and his remaining followers fled west to Spain, to meet up with Marcus Lepidus, who had been one of Caesar's *magister equitum*, and combined their forces, menacing the Republic and Octavian's forces.

On the other side of the Republic in modern day Turkey and Greece, the *optimates* were not idle. As they had been gathering an army, they were just waiting for the reformers to finish each other off until Brutus and Cassius could move in and mop up the rest of the survivors and attempt to save the Republic. This left Octavian in an interesting, but very powerful position. On his North and East his politically aligned enemies sat with a huge army, behind him was Rome unguarded save his own army, and to his West were Brutus and Cassius. In the position he was in, Octavian decided to take after his adopted father, turned South and marched again on Rome, forcefully pushing the senate to declare him consul after the two others had died in battle, as well as declaring all of Caesar's murders enemies of the state, but not Antony and Lepidus.<sup>157</sup> This was an important step for the end of the Republic, as it showed that Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus all had more to gain by working together to get rid of the *optimates* who were now legally enemies of the state than they did by eating each other.

To mend old wounds, all three of them met in a conference and discussed how they would carve up the Republic if they were to win. This meeting not just including how they were

---

<sup>156</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 3, ch. 10.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, book 3, ch. 12-13.

going to win, but they returned the Sullan practice of proscription lists, and included Cicero, who had been Octavian's mentor and defender of the Republic for almost a generation.<sup>158</sup> Those who they all agreed to kill would also face the same punishment as in the times of Sulla by having their property seized by the newly formed Triumvirate, and used to pay their armies and clients as well as any other economic means they would need to secure their position. These killings were different than those of Sulla, as they were not all necessarily the enemies of the state but were people who had the money that the triumvirs needed to secure their position, including people completely neutral in politics. The final part of this conference was creating the Triumvirs not as a political alliance as the first one had been, but instead cemented a kind of legal three-pronged dictatorship, each with equal power to pass laws, charge citizens with crimes, and put to death their own personal enemies. Instead of just one, Rome now had three Sulla's to contend with.<sup>159</sup> With the political situation firmly in their control, Antony and Octavian went east to end the optimates, and left Lepidus in charge of the city.

The campaign in the east truly could have gone either way, as Antony generally carried the campaign as Octavian's forces continued to underperform. After two battles though both Brutus and Cassius had committed suicide after being defeated with much of the glory and reputation gained going to Antony, who had already proved himself as a capable military commander.<sup>160</sup> With this task finished the Republic was carved into three pieces, Antony holding the east from Greece to Libya, Lepidus was given Africa, and Octavian got the west, where Italy was shared between the three but Octavian held the most power in the peninsula. This is often regarded as the end of the Republic, where three kings essentially split the nation in

---

<sup>158</sup> Plutarch, *Antony*, tran. Bernadotte Perrin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), ch. 20.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, ch. 21.

<sup>160</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, book 3, ch. 13-17.

three and no matter who was the last one standing, they were going to rule for life. While in that sense it is true the nation again shifted the way it was run, the Republic was not gone, not yet anyway. There was still a senate, a noble ruling class, plebians in the streets, and tribunes vetoing bills. What had really changed is that instead of two consuls, there was three dictators. The Republic was not gone, just the head of the ruling body had changed and had expanded its powers to that the role of the consul was merged with the power of the dictator.

## **Section 2: The Fall of the Second Triumvirate**

While only one of the Triumvirs could remain in the end, Lepidus was the first to go as he had clearly become the lesser of the partnership and was removed from his position by Octavian without permission of Antony. Lepidus' fall signaled that Octavian was ready to start making moves against his partners to secure for himself the total powers of a singular dictator. The entire time of the second triumvirate all three members were essentially working together only to make sure their personal interests were met, but Octavian and Antony always had issues and a competitive nature between one another. Octavian had done away with Lepidus not because Lepidus had broken the law, but because he contested control of Sicily.<sup>161</sup> While this should have been able to be resolved diplomatically, Octavian was just waiting for his moment to strike against him to secure a better position to weaken Antony's.

From the beginning of the alliance, it was clear that eventually one of them was going to be master of all of Rome, but at the time it was unclear what this meant. With Lepidus taken care of, only Marc Antony and Octavian remained, but as time wore on both of them seemed to be more interested in making themselves a king than they were of a restoration of the Republic to

---

<sup>161</sup> Plutarch, *Antony*, ch. 55, sec. 2.

its former self. No matter who won, it was going to be as if Sulla or Caesar had actually chosen or were able to live out their lives as dictators for life. While the remaining two had essentially crumpled up the *mos maiorum* and thrown it away, Octavian had seemed to respect the façade of it more than Antony did, who was beginning to seem more like an eastern king or despot rather than a dictator of Rome. This thought is something Octavian in Rome indented into the minds of every Roman in the city, that Antony did not just want to make himself king, he wanted to be an *Egyptian* king ruling over Romans.

The offenses committed by Antony were horrendous to the way that the Romans thought of themselves as well as the way Octavian was able to spin them. First, Octavian's sister had married Antony to cement their alliance, but it was well known at the time that Antony had in essence married Cleopatra and had two children by her. This in of itself was a pretext for war, as Antony had dishonored the sister of Octavian by having the affair, but the people and senate were still in part aligned with Antony.<sup>162</sup> This was an instance showing that the senate still had some sway over the Triumvirs as they could not wage war without its backing. What finally broke their trust in Antony was when he began to allocate territory to his children by Cleopatra. These were Roman territories, left to be governed by the children of both a Queen and a Triumvir, essentially giving Egypt the rule of the entire middle east and swaths of North African territory. Further than this to agitate Octavian even more he acknowledged Caesarion, who was supposedly the son of Cleopatra and Caesar as a legitimate son, more legitimate than the adopted Octavian.<sup>163</sup> This was unacceptable, even to the most diehard clients and supports of Antony,

---

<sup>162</sup> Plutarch, *Antony*, ch. 52, section 3.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, ch. 54, sec. 3-5.

leaving Roman territory to a foreign power, undermining the values and ways of Rome.<sup>164</sup>

Octavian had his pretext for war, and was ready to make himself the sole ruler.

While the conflict between the two was long, it also spanned the entirety of the Roman territories. Battles were fought in the Balkans, Greece, throughout the Mediterranean Sea, Libya, and Egypt as Romans continued to kill Romans in the name of Republican virtue in the name of dictators. In the end Octavian and his skilled generals and admirals had driven back Antony and Cleopatra to Egypt where they were besieged in Alexandria. After months of sieging them in the royal palace, both chose death before capture and committed suicide in the palace. The fates of some of their children were as harsh as their parents, as Antony's children from his first marriage before Octavian's sister were put to death, as well as the young Caesarion, but Antony's children with Cleopatra were spared as not being enough of a threat.<sup>165</sup>

Antony was dead, Lepidus was out of the picture, and the *optimates* had been reduced to ruin. The only influential person left standing throughout the entirety of the civil wars was Octavian, now known as Augustus, and ruled Rome as its supreme ruler. While it is true that the Republic Octavian returned to had a different face than the one that Caesar had ruled, or that Sulla had domineered, it was still the same Republic. The shift between Imperial Rome and the Republican was not yet complete. This time period from the death of Caesar is a murky period of uncertainty of the future of the Republic, and as it slowly moved away from the *mos maiorum* that had ruled since the end of the kings. It was this period that showed that the Republic was not

---

<sup>164</sup> While it is probably likely that much of what was said about Antony was true, it does fit perfectly into everything that Octavian needed to get rid of him. It touched the common people that their beloved general had become a "slave" to a foreign queen, the traditionalists despised that he was giving away parts of Rome, and the Republicans looked to Octavian to save the Republic from a foreign monarch. It does beg the question knowing that Octavian was a master of propaganda, how much was really true?

<sup>165</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pg. 53.

immortal as it was once thought to be, but it was changing, evolving into a completely different type of beast.

## **Chapter 6: The End of the End**

With Octavian the sole ruler, his reign began not as a king but as *Princeps*, the first citizen. His intentions, genuine or not, were to return to Rome and return the emergency powers given to him back to the senate and adhere to the constitution, similar to what Sulla had done. While this was an unexpected turn of events, he seemed to all around to be the savior of the Republic yet again, ready to bring back stability to the fragile nation. In the end this never happened, but he did seem to truly want to have some semblance of the *mos maiorum* returned to nation wracked by generations of civil wars and national unrest.<sup>166</sup> From this he tried to reform some of the areas that had caused problems in the first place, by adding new offices as well as reducing some of the powers of the governors who had been causing problems through their corruption. To help the people he tried to reform the physical landscape of the city by giving more jobs to the masses in his public works programs and by allocating more farmland throughout the Republic.<sup>167</sup>

In Italy as well, he seemed to want to continue to expand rights to those within the Republic, as new voting laws were passed that allowed more people in the countryside to be able to participate in elections. He even allowed them to stand for candidacies in the military, which had been henceforth regarded as only Roman positions.<sup>168</sup> For the Republic, the man who is often seen as the final nail in the coffin was actually improving upon and reforming many of the

---

<sup>166</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pg. 58-59.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, pg. 62-68.

<sup>168</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pg. 71.



issues that had brought him to the position in the first place. While we are currently in the end of the Republican era, the transfer of power set the tone for what was going to happen for the rest of the Roman nation. While Rome was used to hereditary positions, there had not been one so far who had passed the dictatorship off to an heir. This is where the murkiness of the transitional period begins to clear, as Octavian decided to formally adopt his stepson, Tiberius, and name him not only heir to his wealth, but title as well.<sup>169</sup> Republican Rome now was slipping away into the memories of those who lived through it as an entire generation was coming up in politics with their only memory being that of Octavian as the sole leader. His usage of the tactics of those who had come before him finally accumulated into the first succession in the imperial era, and to the first real emperor. When Tiberius assumed the mantle after his death, this succession marked the pulling out of the lack of clarity that had come from the civil war period. This shift was going to be the last one that the Roman Republic would ever see.

### **Section 1: Princeps Tiberius**

With Tiberius' position secure from some political maneuvering and assassinations ordered by his mother, he was ready to take the position of the former Triumvir and Princeps. These assassinations were much different than had ever been seen before in Rome. While murdering on the streets was a common theme, it was no longer just party against party, it was a family securing its position at the top, removing all of those who could claim a similar title.<sup>170</sup> Tiberius decided that instead of having the normal lictors, bodyguards, or a guard made up of clients, Tiberius had formed a Praetorian guard, his own small person army who would wield an

---

<sup>169</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, trans. Alfred Church, (New York: Random House, 1942), book 1, ch. 3.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, ch, 6.

enormous amount of influence in the imperial period.<sup>171</sup> <sup>172</sup> Digging deeper into this, allowing a Princeps to have a bodyguard composed not of personal clients or loyal veterans but instead with state paid and appointed guard meant that if they did not like the emperor, they were one of the few who could get close enough to remove them from power.

While it was beginning to become clear that Tiberius was edging Rome away from its Republican past, the Republic was not yet dead. The succession was a major blow, but it still wielded enough power to make decisions and attempt to guide the nation to the best of their abilities. The senate itself still needed to either urge and allow Tiberius to take this position, although through means of genuinely not wanting the position or the attention he got from denying it, they still pushed it upon him. It was the senate who allowed Tiberius this position, not Tiberius himself.<sup>173</sup> Further than this, some of the senate's power was actually expanded, not reduced. First from this, elections were no longer going to be made by the Assemblies of the People, but by the senate themselves, and Tiberius limited the appointments he was going to make.<sup>174</sup> Maybe this was a last gasp of the dying Republic, but as it pulled towards totally imperial control, the senate was not gone, and not even serving a different role, but was beginning to act as the bureaucratic hands of the Princeps.

Tiberius' reign thus far had been one of anxiety, both from within himself and outward about his instability and indecisiveness as a person. Worse than this, he found himself constantly caught between an overbearing mother he could not stand and a senate who demanded more of him, enough to break him. He was often convinced that people close to him were out to kill him

---

<sup>171</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pg. 118.

<sup>172</sup> While the Praetorian guard had been established as bodyguards before this, those under previous were general's guards, usually *evocati*, who were veterans turned client.

<sup>173</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pg. 118-119.

<sup>174</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, book 1, ch. 15.

and take his place. His reign continued to deteriorate as his paranoia got worse, including getting rid of any potential threats to his regime. His tactics were copying the past commissions for corruption, but instead of this crime, he was trying people for treason.<sup>175</sup> After nearly being killed in an accident Tiberius chose to leave the city of Rome, and head southward to Capri where he mostly allotted more power to a trusted companion, Sejanus. This person was not merely a friend, but also the head of the Praetorian guard as well as a political advisor to Tiberius.<sup>176</sup>

The power wielded by Sejanus cannot be understated, nor any less of a cause to the final end of the Republic than even the reign of Octavian. His network of spies acting in name of the Princeps were everywhere, looking into which senator was talking to whom, trying to uncover plots and whispering into the ear of Tiberius that everyone was out to get him. Sejanus at his height more or less controlled the inflow of information to the *princeps* as well as regulated who could or could not be in his presence, regardless of status.<sup>177</sup> From this, Sejanus began to push the *princeps* to the sideline, growing closer and closer to a co-leader than a mere bodyguard. With the *princeps* away in Capri, Sejanus controlled the political situation, and his ever watchful eye took away the freedoms of speech often enjoyed by the senatorial class, as this was a mark of freedom for them during the entire Republican period. As the years Tiberius spent in voluntary exile went by, Sejanus went further than controlling the situation, he wanted to remove anyone else who could be a successor out and try to play up his role. This is where we can see the beginning of the new game that was going to be played in the political ballpark of this era, not

---

<sup>175</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, book 2, ch. 15-26.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, book 4, ch. 1.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, book 4, ch. 41.

politicians battling it out on the senate floor, but those in the inner circle scheming for more power.

Sejanus' whisperings had done the trick, as he had most of the royal family, including the nephews of Tiberius and two of his adopted son's children killed. He was using the treason trials to go after anyone who could be seen as a successor to Tiberius. Only one of them survived, Gaius, who had obtained the nickname Caligula.<sup>178</sup> While it was obvious the threat Caligula posed to Sejanus' takeover, Tiberius wanted to keep him close. This was in part because he was the last living heir for Tiberius to select from, but also because his paranoia had gotten so bad that he needed Caligula close to keep a close watch on his every move. To ensure this he had him kidnaped and brought to Capri where they lived together. This made him an impossible target for the praetorian, and saved Caligula's life.

Sejanus during this time had gone to Rome to consolidate his power, and acted as princeps himself, having people give homage to him as if he was Tiberius.<sup>179</sup> This was unacceptable, and the grandmother of Caligula knew that this was the moment to finally get Tiberius to see the errors of his way and turn against Sejanus. After penning a carefully worded letter she convinced the Princeps to have Sejanus arrested in Rome, and he was executed, and his body destroyed by an angry mob outside of the Temple of Concord along with his supporters being dumped in the Tiber. It would seem that no matter how far Rome progressed from its roots, some parts would never change, but for the first time it was not the senators doing the

---

<sup>178</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pg. 233.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, pg. 246.

killing.<sup>180</sup> The death of the head of the praetorians issued a replacement be made, and another ambition man, Macro would take his place.

When Tiberius finally deciding to come out of exile and return to Rome, he died on the journey and left his power to one of his grandsons and Caligula. Supposedly, after word had come that Tiberius was dead was found out to be false, Macro who had already aligned himself to Caligula had ordered him to be killed before he could prove he was alive and cause any problems.<sup>181</sup> Regardless of this was true, the rumor of it showed in a bold fashion another part of the end of the murkiness of this period. The senate no longer had the power to deal with opponents like had done to Caesar, Saturnius, or the Gracchi, it was left up to the guard and the royal family to act as both the voice and blade of government. To cement Caligula as the sole ruler, Macro also strong armed the senate into nullifying Caligula's co-ruler, making him sole Princeps.<sup>182</sup> As each year went on the power for the senate to do anything was being ebbed away, until their organization became a mere figurehead of what it once was, and the senators merely the embodiment of a time that had passed.

## **Section 2: Princeps Caligula and the Death of the Republic**

The reign of Caligula although a short one compared to his predecessors, marks the true death of the Republic, ending the murkiness of the period. When he died, this was the true end. as the power had shifted so far away from the days of even Sulla, that the government that once was could not be seen to be the same as it had been at the end of Caligula. In Rome, patterns often emerge that parallel what could have been, then turn to disaster. The new *princeps* was

---

<sup>180</sup> Cassius Dio, *Histories*, trans. Ernst Cary, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), book 58, sec. 11.

<sup>181</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, book 6, ch. 50.

<sup>182</sup> Cassius Dio, *Histories*, book 59, sec. 1.

another piece in this system, as the beginning of his reign marked not the tyrannical madman that he is remembered by, but instead of a *princeps* focused on reform, ending the tyranny of the spies of Tiberius, and even allocating more power to the senate. He first acts were to pardon those who Tiberius had imprisoned during his bouts of paranoia, refused the powers of *princeps*, instead deciding to rule as consul with his uncle Claudius as his co-consul.<sup>183</sup>

To the senate, they were shocked and delighted. Their new ruler, after the tyranny before him was returning to the days of Octavian where they enjoyed still some degrees of freedom, and their opinions were again going to matter. For the Republic, which had been seen as a dead idea, was rearing itself again, with the thought of coming back to life with a new head, with a governing body that still matters. Sadly, they were mistaken, and horribly so. One of the first instances of the mania of Caligula came about during a dinner party, where he declared himself King of Rome. While he was talked out of this idea, he instead demanded to be treated as a living god.<sup>184</sup> If there was anything left in the *mos maiorum* of the days of old, Caligula intended to violate every part left. One of the first political moves he made was to get rid of Macro, and anyone else who had initially supported his reign by forcing them to commit suicide.<sup>185</sup> This was in his eyes, to consolidate his power against those who sought to rule through him as Sejanus had done with Tiberius.

His last enemy was the senate, and he intended to go after everyone he could get his hands on. To do this, he reached back to the days of Tiberius. With such a strong network of spies that had gathered enormous amounts of information on every leading persona in the senate and this information had been gathered and compiled into lists. When Caligula had released the

---

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, book 59, sec. 8-9.

<sup>184</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pg. 156.

<sup>185</sup> Cassius Dio, *Histories*, book 59, sec. 10.

prisoners of Tiberius, he also claimed to have burned all these documents and put on a show while doing it. This was all a lie, a masterwork of Caligula's early deceptions to consolidate his rule, and the time had come to tear away the façade they had believed to be true. Instead of going forward with these trials as Tiberius had done, after announcing this to the senate, he simply walked out.<sup>186</sup> While this can be seen as another episode of manic behavior, it is not. There was a message built into this, that he knows everything they have done, but they have no power anymore. In essence he was confirming that the Republic was truly dead, and the lives of those whose position still clung to it, were in his hands now not theirs.

At every turn, Caligula intended to insult the senate and the old order by reminding them that they no longer had the power that they once did, and that he himself was above every governing body. When a senatorial delegation came to meet him after a falsified military victory and offered him honors, he promptly turned them down stating that they could not give him anything, because as their master he owned everything. Further than this when they fearfully inquired about his future plans about returning to Rome, he assured them that "I am coming, never fear, and this -tapping the hilt of his sword- is coming too!"<sup>187</sup> In the end, it had become too much to bear, but the Republic no longer had any teeth or mind whatsoever. It was no longer they who could get rid of a troublesome leader, instead the power shift had been put into the lap of the praetorians and the royal family. They had already tried to kill him once, his own sisters being a part of a failed conspiracy, but it was time for the other half of the power to try and kill him, and they would not fail. His own guards had stabbed him to death, as well as his wife and

---

<sup>186</sup> Cassius Dio, *Histories*, book 59, sec. 16.

<sup>187</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pg. 171.

his young daughter. Shortly thereafter, the praetorian guard kidnapped Claudius, Caligula's uncle and declared him as the next *princeps*.<sup>188</sup>

The death of Caligula marked both the official end and death of the Republic. While the Republic had lost its teeth during the time of Octavian, it still existed. The same institutions that had thrown Tiberius Gracchus into the river commanded the nation while Tiberius was in exile. It wasn't until Tiberius had allowed the praetorian guard to consolidate its power over the senate that the fermentation of the destruction of the senate was allowed to grow. Even when Caligula had taken power it was still the senate who ratified him as being sole *princeps* over his legal co-ruler even if it had no other choice. This all changed as Caligula wielded his personal guard as a weapon, using it as he pleased to remind everyone that the rule of the senate no longer mattered to the Roman nation. This was proven when they had made the decision to assassinate Caligula and his family. It was not a Brutus or a Cassius of distinct royal lineages who would wield the liberator's knife, but instead it was going to be the gladius of a trusted companion of the *princeps*.

In the life of the Republic, there are certain causal factors that persisted throughout its lifetime. The nation itself was incapable of reform except through bouts violence, and any reform was violently opposed. This constant cycle of pushing and pulling only guaranteed that the rubber band of the Republic was going to snap, and under Octavian it began to split until Caligula tore it apart. Every time there was a chance to do so, the reformers failed, and the next time they would come back a little stronger and more aggressive and every time they were put down their cause would later only become more exemplified. Eventually there would no longer

---

<sup>188</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pg.177.



be any need for the Republic to reform itself because instead of doing so, it simply morphed into another creature entirely, taking on a new form as an Empire under the rule of a *princeps*. In this same way, there are parallels that can be drawn between Caligula's insanity and him becoming a product of his time back to Tiberius Gracchus. Both of them had the same aim, trying to overturn the way that the day-to-day had always been done, and both had disrespected the senate in doing so, both opposite ends of the same spectrum.

At the end of the Republic, one thing is for certain, there was no singular cause, nor can one event be wholly described as the reason or time that the Republic collapsed. Instead, it came a series of events spanning hundreds of years, where the clear pool of the *mos maiorum* from the days of Cincinnatus were slowly becoming more and more tainted. The water in the pool being left without change continued to grow murkier until it was unclear what was the Republic, what it stood for, and what powers it had. Sulla believed that the only way to clean the pool was to violently remove anything that made the pool dirty in his own day. Caesar believed that the way to clean it would be to reform it, gently without having any unnecessary violence. In the end, Octavian cleaned the water by changing it entirely, beginning to remove the water, change the pool and creating something completely new. Tiberius already began to break the system by allowing a half-measure of the Republic to exist while he retired to Capri to live out his days, but in the end, Caligula turned his back on the Republic as a whole. From the day after his death, there would be no more sparkling ancient names in the senate, but instead a series of dynasties ruling without answering to anyone. This new nation was ruled by the same violence of the Republic, but instead targeting supposed targets it was against emperors, and not by a proud and aggressive senate, but by the royal court and the *praetorian* guard.

## **Bibliography**

Abbott, Frank. *A History and Description of Roman Political Institutions*. Boston: Ginn & Company, 1901, Archive.org.

Appian. *The Civil Wars*. Translated by Horace White London: Macmillan and CO., 1899, Perseus.org.

Cassius Dio. *Histories*. Translated by Ernst Cary. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914.

Cicero. *Letters to Friends*. Translated by Evelyn Shuckburgh. London: George Bell and Sons, 1908, family 12, letter 4, Perseus.org.

Cicero. *On the Agrarian Law*. Translated by C.D. Younge. London: Bohn's Libraries, 1856, Perseus.org.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus. *Roman Antiquities*. Translated by Earnest Cary. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937, Loeb Classical Library.

Duncan, Mike. *The Storm Before the Storm*. New York: Hachette Book Group, 2017.

Holland, Tom. *Rubicon*. New York: Doubleday, 2003.

Lewis, Naphtali and Meyer Reinhold. *Roman Civilization: The Republic and the Augustan Age vol. 1*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

Livy. *The History of Rome from Its Foundations*. Translated by Aubrey de Sélincourt. London: Penguin Group, 2002.

Livy. *Perioche*. Translated by Jona Lendering, Livius.org, 1995.

Plutarch. *Antony*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920,  
Perseus.org.

Plutarch. *Caesar*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919,  
Perseus.org.

Plutarch. *Cato the Younger*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge: Harvard University  
Press, 1919, Perseus.org.

Plutarch. *Caius Gracchus*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge: Harvard University  
Press, 1921, Perseus.org.

Plutarch. *Caius Marius*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press,  
1920, Perseus.org.

Plutarch. *Cicero*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919,  
Perseus.org.

Plutarch. *Crassus*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916,  
Perseus.org.

Plutarch. *Pompey*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917,  
Persus.org.

Plutarch. *Sulla*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916,  
Perseus.org.

Plutarch. *Tiberius Gracchus*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge: Harvard University  
Press, 1921, Perseus.org.

Polybius. *Histories*. Translated by Evelyn Shuckburg. New York: Macmillan, 1889, Perseus.org.

Sallust. *The Catiline Conspiracy*. Translated by John Watson. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1899, Perseus.org.

Sallust. *The Jugurthine War*. Translated by John Watson. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1899, Perseus.org.

Suetonius. *The Twelve Caesars*. Translated by Robert Graves. New York: Penguin Group, 1957.

Tacitus. *The Annals*. Translated by Alfred Church. New York: Random House, 1942, Perseus.org.